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POWER, PROFIT, AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: HOW NEOLIBERAL  
RATIONALITY LIMITS CITIZEN INFLUENCE IN A DEMOCRACY

By Emma M. Woods

An Independent Study Thesis  
Submitted to the Department of Political Science  
at The College of Wooster  
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Advisor: Désirée Weber

Second Reader: Bas van Doorn



## **Abstract**

Democracy's promise is that citizens hold the ultimate power in government. However, the ascension of neoliberal rationality, an economic rationality that focuses primarily on economic growth with political activity being secondary or merely instrumental to economic growth, acts as a threat to that promise. This paper offers a critical analysis of political participation in a democracy, using two theoretical frameworks, liberalism and neoliberalism. Based in these theoretical frameworks, it provides an analysis of how changes in individual conceptions of self have institutional effects on politics. Laying out the framework of neoliberalism, tracing its ideological roots in liberalism and its subsequent transformations in a United States context, I illustrate these effects through examples of court decisions, public statements by politicians, and newspaper reporting on corporate activity. I then offer two suggestions on how to mitigate neoliberalism's dominance in the public sphere through an emphasis on a plurality of modes of reason. My primary research question is this: Has neoliberal rationality altered the motivations and actions associated with political participation in the United States, and how has this affected the vitality of democracy?

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## Introduction

When President Trump began his campaign in June 2016, he pushed the message that his experience as a CEO would directly translate to success in public office. This sentiment became Trump's calling card, with him and his supporters touting his ability to make deals and cut waste. Tom Maoli, the CEO of a luxury car company based in New Jersey, told Yahoo Finance about why Trump had his support saying "It's time for the country to be run like a business... [Trump] has the right philosophy for the country and where we need to go. He clearly gets business and understands that politics really don't work in this country."<sup>1</sup> Although Maoli stated that politics does not work in the United States he also said of Trump that "he believes in the American dream... in what our forefathers put in place in the Constitution the right way."<sup>2</sup> What is so significant about the statements of a lesser known CEO quoted by Yahoo Finance? The answer is that Maoli, likely unbeknownst to him, summed up a complex phenomenon at work in American politics; one that is increasingly changing the nature of political participation and democracy. The phenomenon is the influx of neoliberal rationality, a framework that applies economic reasoning to all aspects of life outside of the economic realm, in particular political life. This rationality applies a cost benefit analysis to all problems, dictating that profit maximization is the most valuable end that all actions ought to lead to.

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<sup>1</sup> Melody Hahm, "CEO Trump Supporter: 'It's Time for the Country to Be Run like a Business'," Yahoo Finance, accessed March 4, 2018, <https://finance.yahoo.com/news/ceo-trump-supporter-its-time-for-the-country-to-be-run-like-a-business-160402068.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



Wendy Brown defines neoliberalism in her book *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* as “an order of normative reason that, when it becomes ascendant, takes shape as a governing rationality extending a specific formulation of economic values, practices, and metrics to every dimension of human life.”<sup>3</sup> This means that the type of reasoning used concerning economic issues is now being applied to all problems. The economic values of capital accumulation and profit maximization now guide the conduct of all citizens. Neoliberal rationality may be just an expedient way to gain votes to Trump, but it has profound and concrete effects on the practices and structures of democracy. Neoliberalism changes the way citizens conceive of themselves within the greater political structure, as their government is no longer an institution for right and justice but an institution for wealth accumulation. Political participation is no longer a field reserved for citizens to enact their rights of legitimate power over their government but rather a monied game which allows corporations unprecedented control over the political sphere.

Although neoliberalism drastically changes the decision-making process and values-system in politics, it often goes unnoticed because individuals retroactively apply economic rationality to the founding fathers. Maoli illustrates this by stating that Trump will run the United States like a business and that Trump believes in what the forefathers of the Constitution believed. Equating those two statements implies that the forefathers too wanted the United States to be run like a business. However, neoliberalism represents a relatively novel mode of governing, and equating it with classical liberalism allows

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<sup>3</sup> Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*, First Edition (New York: Zone

neoliberalism to operate under the guise of patriotism, traditionalism, and a strict adherence to the Constitution. This is possible because documents such as the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence are bestowed a mythic quality, and therefore given an almost religious-like veneration in the United States. These documents are like holy documents that lay out the framework of acceptable political action. An action that can be tied to Constitutional values is immediately justified. Any deviation from what can be considered a reasonable reading of the documents is coined “un-American” and against what the founding fathers stood for. When neoliberalism is described as a strict adherence to the Constitution it becomes justified and hegemonic in that it becomes the dominant form of reasoning in the political sphere. Those who push back against neoliberalism can be framed as pushing back against the founding fathers themselves. In reality the founding fathers were not neoliberals, they were classical political liberals, inspired by the philosophy of John Locke and this ideology was instituted in the United States as the ideal form of government.<sup>4</sup>

The idealization of Locke and classical political liberalism has some merit. I believe democracy is worth lauding. I disagree, however, with the notion that this ideal form of democracy enumerated in the Constitution and Declaration of Independence has ever actually existed in a perfect form. Rather, I advocate for active recognition of where the reality of democracy falls short of this ideal. This ideal I have been taught my entire life is based in the idea that every person is equal in front of the law and in their ability to

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Books, 2015). Pg. 30

<sup>4</sup> Chuck Braman, “The Political Philosophy of John Locke, and Its Influence on the Founding Fathers and the Political Documents They Created,” *Welcome to ChuckBraman.Com* (blog), 1996.

contribute to their government. Democracy, in its most simplistic form, is the idea that the people rule. Although the United States frequently falls short of these ideals, the constant quest to fulfill them heartens me, and I think democracy is worth preserving exactly because it promotes these noble goals. In particular, the idea that legitimate political authority comes from the people and no royal family or god can endow someone with political authority is an important tenet of United States liberal democracy. This leads to the belief that citizens are in charge of their government. When neoliberalism enters and shapes the consciousness and practices of citizens, these classical notions of equality, justice, and popular political power are altered. The values of profit and capital override the more noble goals of equality, legitimate authority, and liberty.

In order to study the health and preservation of democracy in modern day America I have chosen to narrow my scope to political participation. Political participation is the active engagement of citizens in the creation, implementation, and reformulation of their government, frequently seen through the actions of voting or protest. Political participation acts as a microcosm of democracy because it illustrates to what extent citizens have power over their government as well as if the citizens themselves believe they have power over their government. This concept, of citizen belief that the government will be responsive to their wills, is called political efficacy. Measuring political efficacy can be an indicator of a healthy democracy because when political efficacy is low then democracy fails, democracy necessitates that citizens exercise their legitimate political authority. Political participation also reveals the relationship citizens have to their government in terms of role and responsibility. The

issues citizens consider to be worth their participation, and the issues politicians consider worth consulting the polity on, illustrate what each believe the other ought to be responsible for.

Studying political participation is common in political science but it primarily consists of empirical analysis of “get out the vote” efforts. The field is lacking an in-depth analysis of political participation from a theoretical perspective, particularly the ways in which ideology and rationality shape why and how people participate in the political process. This Independent Study seeks to answer the following three questions: 1) how does neoliberal rationality change the motivations and actions associated with political participation; 2) how is political participation under neoliberal rationality different from political participation under classical liberalism; and 3) how does this shift alter the vitality of democracy overall. I will argue that neoliberalism promotes a particular conception of the self in citizens, described as human capital, which constructs citizens as the sum of their experiences judged against their relative economic competitiveness. This changes the way citizens interact with their political system, as the neoliberalism cements the goal of profit maximization as ascendant. This differs from liberalism in that liberalism promoted a less reductive conception of humanity, as righteous and unselfish, and promoted a form of political participation that was active and with the goal justice. This shift from liberal political participation to neoliberal political participation changes who holds political power, from the citizens to corporations with more capital and therefore more influence, and alters the very nature of democracy from

an institution to establish security and prosperity for all to an institution that alienates its citizens from itself for the benefit of the wealthy.

In Chapter One I will analyze the theoretical arguments of my primary scholars, John Locke, Wendy Brown, Karl Marx, and Michel Foucault. In Chapter Two I will reconstruct political participation in both a liberal and neoliberal perspective, argue that neoliberalism uses liberalism as a vehicle, using its frameworks but altering them slightly as to go unnoticed, and illustrate their conceptual and material differences, specifically the ways in which neoliberalism is reductive of the citizen and reductive of citizen motivations to act. In Chapter Three I will apply my theoretical lens of neoliberal political participation to recent political events in the United States to illustrate the ways neoliberalism strips citizens of their political power by reformulating corporate interest as patriotism, recruiting citizens to be complicit in their own domination. I will conclude by arguing that a plurality of modes of reason, particularly those that critique neoliberalism, is necessary to slow or halt the hegemony neoliberalism has in United States politics.

## **Chapter One: Liberalism, Neoliberalism, and their Critiques**

### *Lockean Classical Political Liberalism:*

Classical political liberalism is arguably the most preeminent political thought, particularly within the western world. This thought is grounded in thinkers such as John Locke, John Stuart Mill, and Alexis de Tocqueville, each having a profound influence on the development of the United States. I have chosen Locke's *Second Treatise* as the representative of classical political liberalism because Locke is known to be a weighty influence on the framers of the United States Constitution and I intend to stay within a United States National context.

Locke bases his theory of liberalism in the idea of natural law. Natural law is described as the framework of action that exists for all people while in the state of nature, before any political relationships develop. It is a state of perfect freedom and equality between people. Because of this fundamental equality it logically follows that there are no justifiable hierarchies that exist in the state of nature. Importantly, Locke grounds his theory in the idea of natural law. Natural law is known through observation and rationality, and can be described as the accumulation of all precedent laws that govern humans. Natural law is Locke's normative and secular set of principles that act as the framework of action within which humans exist. The most important natural law is freedom. In the state of nature, where there are no other laws except the natural law, humans have perfect freedom of thought and action. This freedom cannot even be

abridged by societal laws, which are artificially created by people, because it is prior to society, endowed in all people and transcendent across time and space.

However, even in the state of nature there are some limits on human action, meaning that perfect freedom, or as Locke often calls it, perfect liberty, is not a state of license. The example of the difference between liberty and license is that natural law prohibits people from destroying their own corporal self. Locke states, “though man in that state has an uncontrollable liberty to dispose of his person or possessions, yet he has not liberty to destroy himself, or so much as any creature in his possession.”<sup>5</sup> This refers to Locke’s assertion that all people are equal and no natural hierarchies between people exist, so the rational conclusion is that there is no right to harm a member of the human race. Locke also justifies this natural law by arguing that because all people are God’s creation they are God’s property and therefore only God has the right to dispose of people. Locke argues that “being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions.”<sup>6</sup> If someone harms another they are placing themselves in a state of war which in turn opens them up to being harmed themselves.

Deriving from Locke’s conception natural law, natural equality, and natural liberty, he presents his views on ownership of public property, grounded in the law of self-ownership and self-determination. Self-ownership means each person’s authority over their corporeal self and self-determination means the ability to use one’s consciousness to decide, sovereignly, what one will do with one’s corporeal self and

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<sup>5</sup> David Wootton, ed., *Modern Political Thought: Readings from Machiavelli to Nietzsche*, 2nd ed (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Company, Inc, 2008). Pg. 287

one's surroundings, within the limits of natural law. People cannot kill themselves but otherwise they have full sovereign authority over their body. This is the precursor to private property as Locke characterizes the authority to use one's own body as ownership of the body. Since this self-ownership exists in the state of nature Locke presents the idea of ownership as something that cannot be abridged by any society because it exists prior to society, just as freedom and equality do. Locke makes a theoretical leap after describing self-ownership in stating that when one mixes one's labor with raw material the product of this process is under the private ownership of the individual. He states:

every man has property in his own person: this no body has any right to but himself. The labour of his body, and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that nature hath provided and left it is, he hath mixed his labour with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property<sup>7</sup>

Locke gives an example of tilling fields, stating that one may till a field, mixing their labor with the land and producing an amount of food that would not have existed otherwise. The person doing the tilling, then, owns both the food produced and the land upon which it was cultivated as an extension of their ownership of their body and their ability to direct it.

Locke states that appropriation of land by one individual does no harm to anyone else as long as "there [is] still enough, and as good left; and more than the yet unprovided could use. So that, in effect, there was never the less left for others because of his enclosure for himself."<sup>8</sup> This is called the enough and as good condition and it implies

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., Pg. 287

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., Pg. 293

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., Pg. 294



that Locke views property acquisition as a positive sum game, in that when people take some land as private property to cultivate no other person is worse off because there is enough and as good land to cultivate. Locke continues this line of thinking in saying “every man should have as much [land] as he could make use of... since there is land enough in the world to suffice double the inhabitants.”<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the cultivation of property creates more products such as food that can benefit the entire community. Locke states that “he who appropriates land to himself by his labour, does not lessen, but increase the common stock of mankind.”<sup>10</sup>

On the subject of land cultivation and resource use, Locke does not acknowledge the existence of scarcity, meaning that in Locke’s theory of liberalism all people have the opportunity to acquire property and therefore all people have the opportunity to better themselves, economically and otherwise. Furthermore, “a right to acquire property is a very different thing to a right to an equal amount of property. When it comes to individual property holdings, Locke believed that these holdings should reflect labour and effort.”<sup>11</sup> This is evidence in that Locke continually describes humans as naturally industrious. This coupled with Locke’s lack of conception of scarcity reveals that Locke thought there was enough land for all people to be industrious and therefore if they did not have as much property to cultivate as others it was likely their own fault.

A second condition of property acquisition forwarded by Locke is non-spoilage. Spoilage is the only condition in which one's right to private property is limited, “as

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., Pg. 295

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., Pg. 296

[people] cannot claim ownership of land so extensive that [they] cannot cultivate it and turn it to human purposes.”<sup>12</sup> This condition is nearly entirely allayed through the invention and proliferation of currency. Using money that can “keep without wasting or decay”<sup>13</sup> as a placeholder for goods allows for people to increase their own private stock of property far beyond what one could in the state of nature. The increase in private property stock in turn allows individuals to hold a surplus of goods (as represented through the hoarding of money), something almost impossible in the state of nature. Money also allowed for the development of market capitalism in which one individual has a private stock of property that they are unable to tend to alone and therefore pay others to work to increase another’s capital stock for a wage. This is a point that Marx takes great issue with in the future.

Because Locke strategically identifies property rights as part of the state of nature and natural law, no government can claim an ability to abridge property rights. He holds property rights in such a high esteem that he states that the safety and security of public property is the driving reason individuals consent to join a political association. Kelly, writing about Locke, states that the purpose of joining a political association is for economic protection. Namely, “the point of pooling our property is merely that it marks the boundary of the jurisdiction of the state in enforcing and securing property.”<sup>14</sup> In the state of nature there are possibilities for someone to encroach upon another’s property

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<sup>11</sup> Paul Kelly, *Locke’s Second Treatise of Government: A Reader’s Guide* (Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2007). Pg. 72

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., Pg. 73

<sup>13</sup> Wootton, *Modern Political Thought*. Pg. 296

<sup>14</sup> Kelly, *Locke’s Second Treatise of Government: A Reader’s Guide*. Pg. 97

and either take it for themselves or use violence to denigrate it, as the state of nature provides no enforcement system to stop someone from doing this or recourse to a neutral arbiter if they do. Therefore, entering a political association is worthwhile because of its ability to secure property rights in a way that cannot be done while still in the state of nature. It is “through government that our rights are protected and secured and the public good is promoted”<sup>15</sup> with public good meaning anything that protects the natural liberty of humans.

Since political association has the benefits of security, Locke continues his argument to tackle how people enter this association. He emphasizes that since there are no natural hierarchies between people, and no person can legitimately impose their will upon another, there is no possibility for legitimate absolute power. His abhorrence for despotism is clear in this aspect. Locke’s political liberalism is called a social contract theory, meaning it places the onus for political association upon the active consent of the participants. Consent and participation are valuable because Locke believes that the legitimate political power comes only from each individual person, not from divine backing or brute force. People ought to be seen as individual actors who have the right to supreme self-determination based on natural law and therefore no other person can impose their will upon another without full consent. Locke states that the only way joining a political association can be viewed as legitimate is through agreement of all parties “to join and unite into a community, for their comfortable, safe, and peaceable living one amongst another, in a secure enjoyment of their properties, and a greater

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., Pg. 101

security against any, that are not of it.”<sup>16</sup> Active consent through voting for favored provisions is the method that Locke forwards to enact consensual rules governing a political association once it is established. He believes majority rule (rather than unanimous rule) should be the goal of a legitimate political entity because a group of individuals associating together is like one body, and any decision should be supported by as close to the entire body as possible. Unanimous rule is not considered feasible by Locke because a “variety of opinions, and contrariety of interests”<sup>17</sup> are unavoidably found in a group of people.

A line can be drawn from Locke’s conception of liberalism, as described in previous paragraphs, to the political thought of the American Revolution, as well as to contemporary American political thought. Classical political liberalism is an ideology focused on individuals who seek political association in order to establish both economic and political security through the active and consensual participation of association members. Even more subtly, Locke shaped American political thought through defining society as a group of individuals and forwarding an individualistic analysis of politics and economics. Within Locke’s theory, “individual rights claims enjoy pre-eminence over group or collective rights.”<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, the relationship of the individual to the state is shaped by a “historical distrust of government that undercut their habitual loyalty to political leaders and urged them to condition consent on political leader’s

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<sup>16</sup> Wootton, *Modern Political Thought*. Pg. 312

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., Pg. 312

<sup>18</sup> Paul Kelly, *Locke’s Second Treatise of Government: A Reader’s Guide*. Pg. 64

performance.”<sup>19</sup> Therefore each individual in Locke’s liberalism is skeptical of the government but also an active participant in the government in order to continue to further their own individual rights.

### *Marxism as a Critique of Liberalism:*

Karl Marx’s critique of capitalism is, in many ways, a direct response and critique of Locke’s theory of liberalism. Locke argues that joining a political association allows for the protection of property and that this ability to secure property in conjunction with the invention of money as a placeholder for goods allows people to stockpile goods without spoilage. The ability to stockpile without spoilage is presented as a societal advantage by Locke, as he says that those who appropriate land increases the common stock for all people. He goes so far as to say that through the “tacit and voluntary consent”<sup>20</sup> to assign currency exchange value, people have “found out a way how a man may fairly possess more land than he himself can use the product of, by receiving in exchange for the overplus, gold and silver, which may be hoarded up without injury to anyone.”<sup>21</sup> Marx disagrees with Locke fundamentally concerning amassing private property and capital in the form of currency.

First, Marx notes the difference between the way people produce and the way animals produce. Animals produce “under the domination of immediate physical need”<sup>22</sup> whereas people are able to produce for other reasons, such as aesthetic or trade purposes,

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<sup>19</sup> MARK E. KANN, ed., “Citizens and the State,” in *On The Man Question*, Gender and Civic Virtue in America (Temple University Press, 1991), 143–65. Pg. 165

<sup>20</sup> Wootton, *Modern Political Thought*. Pg. 299

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., Pg. 299

and they are able to produce much more than they immediately need without risks of spoilage because of the invention of money, as Locke points out. Humans, then, have a fundamentally different relationship with production than animals. Marx points to the way in which an individual in capitalism may participate in the action of production, expending their own labor, but not reap the immediate benefits of that production the way an animal would because animals are producing for need.

Marx launches a specific critique against Locke about the issue of production and how private property and money make people's relationship with production different than that of animals with production. Namely, he points to the detrimental effects of these factors and pushes back against what he sees as a cursory analysis of how these factors affect the laborer, the most important actor in Marx theoretical universe. In his essay *On Alienation* Marx describes four types of alienation, with alienation being the term Marx uses to denote an object or activity that ought to be under the control of people yet is not due to capitalist labor. These four ways are not overtly labeled within *On Alienation* and will be described hereafter as alienation from the body, alienation from action and interaction with nature, alienation from the community, and alienation from the other person.

Turning to the first type of alienation that Marx describes, which is alienation from the physical body, it is important to note that Marx writes within a context of industrialization in which the most predominant form of labor is factory work in which many people performed arduous and often dangerous tasks for little pay in order to

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., Pg. 769

produce a good that often they could not afford. With this in mind, the physical aspect of labor, the literal human body that becomes worn down from working, is what Marx is referring to. He states that, “labor not only produces commodities. It also produces itself and the worker as a commodity, and indeed in the same proportion as it produces commodities in general.”<sup>23</sup> This means that just as a factory structure produces identical commodity goods, it also produces each individual person’s physical labor, as an identical commodity. Marx continues that, “the product of labor is labor embodied and made objective in a thing.”<sup>24</sup> People are reduced to an input and in this way alienated from their physical bodies which are used to create wealth for someone else. Humans are also alienated from the thing that they have produced. Locke explains ownership as existing after labor is mixed with nature to produce something else, yet in capitalism Marx points out that the goods produced are alien to those who produce them, as the laborers have no ownership of them. In fact, Marx goes so far as to say that the good produced has power over those whose labor created it. The physical body, then is directed by the product, not by the person. Marx explains this saying, “labor appears as the diminution of the worker, the objectification as the loss of and subservience to the object, and the appropriation as alienation, as externalization.”<sup>25</sup> That is to say, the goods produced through factory production is the ends and people are merely a means.

The second form of alienation is people’s alienation from action and interaction with nature. This alienation is closely related to alienation from the body but rather than

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., Pg. 767

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., Pg. 767

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., Pg. 767

being focused on the literal physicality of a human, it involves the process of labor, the mental and physical action required in the process of production. Marx states that “if the product of work is externalization, production itself must be active externalization.”<sup>26</sup> This does not just mean the physical action but also the mental action involved in the labor process. The actions they are performing are alien to the worker and alien from the nature used to produce a product. Marx explains this further by noting that:

the worker, therefore, feels at ease only outside work, and during work he is outside himself. He is at home when he is not working and when he is working he is not at home. His work, therefore, is not voluntary, but coerced, forced labor... Its alien character is obvious from the fact that as soon as no physical or other pressure exists, labor is avoided like the plague.<sup>27</sup>

This is a place where the context of factory work enters Marx’s analysis, as Marx is specifically considering the mundane and arduous tasks involved in unskilled factory work. No person would willfully spend their entire life performing those actions which yield nothing for them personally. Marx continues, saying “the external nature of work for the worker appears in the fact that it is not his own but another persons’ that in work he does not belong to himself but to someone else.”<sup>28</sup> This resembles alienation of the body but goes further in that it acknowledges that the act of capitalist labor benefits someone else other than the laborer. The owner of capital benefits from the work of others, in that it creates goods that the capitalist owns and can use and profit from, but the worker is alienated from the action they perform and the way they interact with the raw

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., Pg. 768

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., Pg. 768

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., Pg. 768



materials they use to produce because their product is alien to them and the worker receives no benefit from it.

The third form of alienation that Marx discusses is alienation from the community. Marx frequently describes the collection of humanity as consisting of a single species-being. Humans are species-beings in that their individual lives encompass and represent the life of the species. All people are microcosms of the community in that their actions continually affect others as well as themselves. Marx describes his conception of species-being saying that a person can be described as such “not only in that he practically and theoretically makes his own species... [and] in that as present and living species he considers himself to be a universal and consequently free being.”<sup>29</sup> Humans cannot be understood in a vacuum, and although individual, each person is reliant on each other to some degree and not atomistic. Locke’s view was that people associate to secure property and through the cultivation of property, the common good of all is promoted. Marx does not see this playing out in reality. In alienating people from themselves and from their labor activities, people are alienated in one of the essential ways that they relate to others. The community structure changes as people no longer are producing for themselves and those they care for. Marx explains this saying:

The object of labor is thus the objectification of man’s species-life: he produces himself not only intellectually, as in consciousness, but also actively in a real sense and sees himself in the world he made. In taking from man the object of his production, alienated labor takes from his species-life, his actual and objective existence as a species.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., Pg. 768

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. Pg. 769

This means that people are alienated from the greater society, and the conception people have of where they fit into the societal structure becomes a conception of estrangement. People come together to associate, and production has increased in capitalism, but the collective good, meaning the maximum amount of benefit for all, is not being produced through this; only some individuals, the capital owners, are benefiting from this association while other members of society are not receiving any benefit or are experiencing detriment. Marx uses the word “consciousness”,<sup>31</sup> stating that the consciousness of being part of a species, a community larger than just oneself, is altered through alienation. He states that “life itself appears only as a means of life.”<sup>32</sup> People are alienated from the purpose of their association, as association is only a means to subsistence in capitalism.

The culmination of each of the previous three forms of alienation -- first from the body, then from the action of labor, then from the larger community-- is found in the fourth way that Marx describes alienation, which is alienation from the other person. The other person is literally one person’s alienation from the immediate other person, to differentiate this form from alienation of one person from the entire community. Marx explains that “every self-alienation of man, from himself and from nature, appears in the relationship which he postulates between other men and himself and nature.”<sup>33</sup> This means that each of the past alienations, causing people to be alienated from themselves, create alienation between each individual’s relation to each other individual. For Marx,

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., Pg. 770

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., Pg. 769

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., Pg. 771

this is seen in the way that people exploit each other in capitalism. He states: “just as he begets his own product as a loss, a product not belonging to him, so he begets the domination of the non-producer overproduction and over product.”<sup>34</sup>

These four ways that people experience alienation through capitalism are a direct response to the way Locke conceives of social relations based on property. Marx argues that this alienation pervades the way people exist economically, socially, and politically, but he also suggests that there are ways and places that people can exist outside of alienation. Marx states that people are alienated from the act of labor but that “the worker... feels at ease only outside of work”<sup>35</sup> and “the worker feels that he is acting freely only in his animal functions – eating, drinking, and procreating, or at most in his shelter and finery.”<sup>36</sup> In this way Marx is primarily focused on how people exist in the economic realm as an alienated worker, although the implications of his analysis enter several realms as he notes that people are alienated from their species.

#### *Foucauldian Construction of Neoliberalism:*

Michel Foucault, in his lectures *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France 1978-1979*, offers a bridge from the world of liberalism to the world of neoliberalism. He starts by reformulating many of Marx’s points on the issues inherent in the capitalist construction of labor but expands his analysis to include the new rationality of neoliberalism and how it interacts within the greater community and offers a critique

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., Pg. 770

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., Pg. 768

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., Pg. 768

of the way neoliberal subjects are controllable. With this discussion, he brings up productive power, meaning how in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century power exerted over a subject by a government is often soft power, in other words, not conspicuously forceful, which produces a subject that is more easily governable. The subject of any political system is a manifestation of the will of the government in that the government will attempt to produce ideal citizens for that particular system of power. Throughout his analysis Foucault will argue that neoliberalism alters the political system which in turn alters the political subject to fit within this new system and therefore an analysis of the subject aids in understanding their relationship with the government.

To begin, Foucault notes that classical economics, the economics attributed to Adam Smith and David Ricardo with influence from John Locke,<sup>37</sup> formulates output as a function of two inputs, those being capital and labor. With this conception of production comes the assumption that labor is static and can only be altered through the variable of time. This means that one person's labor is exactly equal to another's and the only way to increase or decrease labor productivity is through either increasing the number of laborers or increase the time they spend working. Foucault sees this as reductive. Labor, he would say, is not akin to capital in that labor is the factor representing a human being's life cycle, made up of experiences, innate skills, age, and many other factors. Because of this Foucault draws upon the analysis of Marx to discuss further the idea of alienation of labor. He says;

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<sup>37</sup> Michel Foucault and Michel Senellart, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-79* (Basingstoke [England]; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). Pg. 220

the labor in all this is “abstract,” that is to say, the concrete labor transformed into labor power, measured by time, put on the market and paid by wages, is not concrete labor; it is labor that has been cut off from its human reality, from all its qualitative variables, and precisely – this is indeed, in fact, what Marx shows – the logic of capital reduces labor to labor power and time. It makes it a commodity and reduces it to the effects of value produced.<sup>38</sup>

Understanding labor reductively caused an issue for the laborers who were experiencing the ill effects of capitalist production. This issue became evident to liberal theorists when Marxist critiques of market economies grew in popularity in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

Liberals, then, attempted to combat the increased sympathy for Marxist (and tangential leftist) ideology by addressing the issue of reductive labor through redefining the labor input of production in a less problematic way. Foucault points to the economic theorist Friedrich Hayek who attempted to combat socialist fervor and anti-liberal policy in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by forwarding the idea of a liberal utopia. Foucault states that Hayek’s view was that “It is up to us to create liberal utopias, to think in a liberal mode, rather than presenting liberalism as a technical alternative for government. Liberalism must be a general style of thought, analysis, and imagination.”<sup>39</sup> This position grounds a neoliberal critique of liberalism.

Just as Marx took issue with liberalism, Hayek and others forward critique of liberalism, but in that it was not liberal enough. Liberalism in a utopian form would consist of no government influence in market structures. Foucault says, “since the economic mechanism involves each pursuing his own interest, then each must be left alone to do so. Political power is not to interfere with this dynamic naturally inscribed in

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., Pg. 221

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., Pg. 219

the heart of man. The government is thus prohibited from obstructing individual interest.”<sup>40</sup> This is in keeping with Locke although Locke never explicitly recognized the political and the economic as separate spheres. He did hold that the purpose of civil society was to create security for private property but the actions of government hereafter were only to allow for the most viable measure of freedom of people and to promote the common good, without reference to direct interference into issues of trade, production, or other economic mechanisms. Locke’s state of nature is primarily judicial in nature as he argues that people, all of whom are self-interested, require a neutral arbiter to settle disputes. He continues this sentiment saying, “the commonwealth comes by a power to set down what punishment shall belong to the severe transgressions which they think worthy of it”<sup>41</sup> which means the commonwealth exists expressly to create and enforce laws. This is also evident in that Locke uses the terms civil society and political society as synonyms. He states, “Wherever therefore any number of men are so united into one society, as to quit every one of his executive power of the law of nature, and to resign it to the public, there and there only is a political, or civil society.”<sup>42</sup>

The existence of liberal utopia would also require a more complex conception of labor in order to make up for the reduction of labor that liberalism often forwards. That is to say, in a liberal utopia the concerns of classical liberalism would need to be addressed, particularly that labor is considered stagnate. A more complex conception of labor became known as human capital. The two inputs of production are become both physical

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., Pg. 280

<sup>41</sup> Wootton, *Modern Political Thought*. Pg. 309

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., Pg. 309

capital and human capital rather than physical capital and labor. Foucault argues that this materialized as an approach to policy growth no longer “simply indexed to the problem of material investment of physical capital, on the one hand, and of the number of workers, [on the other], but a policy of growth focused precisely on one of the things that the West can modify most easily, and that is the form of investment in human capital.”<sup>43</sup> Human capital can be described as ascribing the characteristics of a business, often called a firm, to an individual person. This includes an ability to amass capital which has future earning potential. Foucault names human capital *homo oeconomicus*, or economic man. He argues,

*Homo oeconomicus* is an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself. This is true to the extent that, in practice, the state in all neoliberal analyses is the replacement every time of *homo oeconomicus* as partner of exchange with a *homo oeconomicus* as entrepreneur of himself, being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings.<sup>44</sup>

Humans can acquire attributes that will increase income in the future. In human form, this materializes as amassing education or other skills that make one employable.

Foucault posits that the theory of human capital represents two important processes, those being “the extension of economic analysis into a previously unexplored domain, and second, on the basis of this, the possibility of giving a strictly economic interpretation of a whole domain previously thought to be non-economic.”<sup>45</sup> Human life is now described under economic, and specifically capitalist terms. Choices are determined by return on investment. Education is capital accumulation. Marrying is a risk

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<sup>43</sup> Foucault and Senellart, *The Birth of Biopolitics*. Pg. 232

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., Pg. 226

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., Pg. 219

averse activity. And as Foucault says, the encroachment of economic rationality into economic spheres does not mean that these spheres are now evaluated through multiple rationalities; neoliberalism squeezes out the previously dominant rationality, taking over the domain for itself. This is because neoliberal rationality goes beyond other rationalities in not only establishing a set of values that govern action but by forcing an end goal, justifying the ends of macroeconomic growth as preeminent. Foucault states that “every element of civil society is assessed by the good it will produce or bring about for the whole...”<sup>46</sup> with neoliberal rationality redefining good as strictly wealth accumulation.

The inescapable quality of neoliberalism means that the original idea of a liberal utopia, in which there is no alienation and each individual is free to pursue their own interests to complete ends, is disrupted. It is disrupted in that neoliberalism does not stop at sanctifying economic rationality; it enters all other spheres and takes over as the dominant rationality, placing an economic ends as the sole ends. That is to say, neoliberalism forces the same ends in every sphere, including the sphere of government. Foucault argues that classical liberalism is based on the assertions that there is an “essential incompatibility between the non-totalizable multiplicity of economic subjects of interest and the totalizing unity of the juridical sovereign.”<sup>47</sup> This means that economic subjects have an infinite amount of interests that cannot be known by a government, and therefore the economic sphere of non-totalizable multiplicity cannot be effectively understood or governed by a unified sovereign that aims for totality. Neoliberalism enters the realm of government, prescribes economic rationality to the sphere, dictates

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., Pg. 300-301



macroeconomic growth as an ends which all means must advance, and principally remakes the government as interventionist for the purpose of economic growth. The government, then, is not as imagined by Hayek to be a liberal utopia, but a neoliberal intrusionist government.

Foucault's analysis is particularly useful for analyzing the shift from liberalism to neoliberalism for two reasons. First, his contention that neoliberalism is not only a political ideology, but rather, a form of rationality, explains the way it manifests in multiple systems and fields of thought instead of remaining only economic or only political. Second, Foucault's analysis of the subject is useful when deconstructing the relationship of the citizen to the state and the will of the government. Foucault would call soft power productive power, a reshaping of the citizen that reproduces structures that make subjugation easier. That is to say, productive power is power that promotes certain qualities in a subject that make them more easily subjugated. Foucault's analysis of the subject is useful because a discussion of the nature of the subject is key to understanding the nature of a power structure as the subject reveals the desires of said structure.

*Brown Neoliberalism as an Extension of Foucault:*

Wendy Brown expands upon Foucault's conception of neoliberalism in *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*. Brown's cohesive explanation of neoliberalism, which not only builds upon Foucault but also extends the analysis of Foucault's postulations, will act as my framework for neoliberalism in this work. She

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., Pg. 282

states: “I join Michel Foucault and others in conceiving neoliberalism as an order of normative reason that, when it becomes ascendant, takes shape as a governing rationality extending a specific formulation of economic values, practices, and metrics to every dimension of human life.”<sup>48</sup> The Foucault-Brown conception of neoliberalism as a rationality has been accepted as a prevailing conception of neoliberalism within the field of theory and within non-academic spheres. Articles such as “Neoliberalism: The Idea that Swallowed the World” by Stephen Metcalf of the *Guardian* apply this theoretical framework. Although other academic fields may use the term neoliberalism differently than Brown, I will stay within her definition of neoliberalism as a pervasive market rationality. This is not to be confused with other uses of the term within the field of International Relations or other disciplines.

She begins by re-establishing neoliberalism as a form of rationality rather than only a political ideology. Brown follows the lead of Foucault in describing neoliberalism as a rationality for many reasons. This is important at the outset because it ascertains that neoliberalism is inherently linked with a market economy, stating that citizens approach “everything as a market and knows only market conduct.”<sup>49</sup> Second, theorizing neoliberalism as a rationality explains its pervasive nature. Political ideologies largely stay within the political realm but neoliberalism especially is found within every sphere of modern life. That is because as a rationality neoliberalism sets up a predominant system of values and prescribes what rational action is, and these value systems and rational methods can be applied to any decision-making process. These two things seep

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<sup>48</sup> Brown, *Undoing the Demos*. Pg. 30

into the subject, the citizen, and alter the relationship between the citizen and the state. The difference between a rationality and an ideology is not mutual exclusion. A rationality is part and parcel to an ideology, in that an ideology necessitates a value system and a recommendation of action, which is primarily the project of rationalities. The reasoning for discussing neoliberalism as a rationality is because it allows for application into more spheres than merely the political proper. It also does not take hard policy stances but rather only establishes end goals. Brown discusses the way neoliberal rationality affects the political sphere in stating, “political rationality is not itself an instrument of governing, but rather the condition of possibility and legitimacy of its instruments, the field of normative reason from which instruments and techniques such as those discussed in this chapter are forged.”<sup>50</sup>

The foundation of neoliberal rationality is a cost-benefit analysis. In classical economics, all beings are rational actors attempting to minimize their costs and maximize their profits. What matters is how cost and profits are defined. In every sphere, there are varying value systems that inform why something is considered good or bad. Neoliberalism proscribes good as anything that increases wealth, but more specifically, those things that aid in macroeconomic growth. Brown states; “economic growth has become both the end and legitimation of government.”<sup>51</sup> The costs within neoliberal rationality are the equal and opposite of its profits, so anything that could put a dent in macroeconomic growth is a cost to be mitigated. This does not necessarily have to be real

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., Pg. 39

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., Pg. 121

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., Pg. 26

monetary costs and could instead be action or approaches to law that actually cut into or appear to cut into the bottom line of the government.

Describing neoliberalism as a rationality is purposeful in that a rationality is not topic specific, rather, it can be applied to any sphere because it is a mode of logic that governs action. Therefore, neoliberalism is able to seep into multiple realms of thought. The reason neoliberalism has become such a buzzword in recent years is that it has become prominent in every aspect of human life. Not only is it present in all forms of decision-making, neoliberalism chokes out all other forms of decision-making because it mandates the ends of macroeconomic growth, as well as positions macroeconomic growth as underlying all other ends. Brown argues that all possible ends require macroeconomic growth and therefore neoliberal rationality can enter any sphere and proscribe its specific value system and mode of action upon said sphere. This is because macroeconomic growth must be reached in order to further any other ends. Brown argues that government viewed through the lens of neoliberal rationality is

both responsible for fostering economic health and as subsuming all other undertakings (except national security) to economic health... this formulation means that democratic state commitments to equality, liberty, inclusion, and constitutionalism are now subordinate to the project of economic growth, competitive positioning, and capital enhancement.<sup>52</sup>

All other ends, such as equality, liberty, and inclusion as Brown brings up, cannot stand on their own. They are reducible in some way to macroeconomic growth.

Therefore, neoliberalism eliminates the ends of any other form of reasoning by overpowering the original ends. All possible goals of the state can be reduced to the goal

of wealth accumulation because no other ends are reachable without the qualifying ends of wealth. That is how neoliberalism has become the preeminent form of rationality, as every field of thought now views economic health of the state as paramount. This does not only apply to institutions or fields of thought however, as it has invaded the very mind and self-conception of the individual. Brown argues that “economic values have not simply supersaturated the political or become predominant over the political. Rather, a neoliberal iteration of homo oeconomicus is extinguishing the agent, the idiom, and the domains through which democracy – any variety of democracy – materializes.”<sup>53</sup> The term homo oeconomicus is based in Foucault, in which he attempted to define subjects by what was thought of to be their defining characteristic. These characteristics could be being moral, being political, or being economic as is the case with neoliberalism. Brown states that “homo politicus in modernity is simultaneously rooted in individual sovereignty and signals the promise of social, political, and legal respect for it”<sup>54</sup> whereas homo oeconomicus is “fundamentally economic.”<sup>55</sup> People, then, act as a vehicle for neoliberalism to enter non-economic fields because when one’s self-conception is that of human capital than all other realms appear to be opportunities for either capital accumulation or devaluation. She argues, “within neoliberal rationality, human capital is both our “is” and our “ought” – what we are said to be, what we should be, and what the rationality makes us into through its norms and construction of environments.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., Pg. 26-27

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., Pg. 79

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., Pg. 109

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., Pg. 80-81

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., Pg. 36

Brown maintains that the shift from liberalism to neoliberalism is evident in various political incidents in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. She argues, “the success of neoliberal rationality in remaking citizenship and the subject is indexed by the lack of a scandalized response to the state’s new role in prioritizing, serving, and propping a supposedly free-market economy.”<sup>57</sup> This contrasts with the skepticism of the liberal citizen. According to Brown the neoliberal subject no longer involves itself in government to protect its self-interest from despotism but rather involves itself in government in order to further the established goals of the state, making the citizen merely a tool of the state rather than an agent of its own interests. Due to the fact that neoliberalism’s sole value is macroeconomic growth, the subject is constructed to further that goal. Brown states that each citizen’s life is a “project of macroeconomic growth and credit enhancement to which neoliberal individuals are tethered and with which their existence as human capital must align if they are to thrive.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., Pg. 40

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., Pg. 84

## **Chapter Two: A Theoretical Construction of Political Participation**

### *Political Participation According to Locke*

Locke does not explicitly discuss political participation within his *Second Treatise*, at least not in the way political participation materialized in the United States. This is because Locke could not have predicted the size of the United States as well as the myriad of issues that require citizen participation in modern society. Locke does, however, lay out a series of normative arguments that reasonably lead to the conclusion that he supports the active political participation of each citizen. The assertions that inform this argument are his emphasis that legitimate political authority is only possible via the consent of each person rather than through divine right or patriarchal lineage; that continuous consent is necessary to the establishment and management of a government; and that the purpose of government is to protect private property, beginning with one's own life, and to act as a neutral arbiter between disputing parties. These three principles work in conjunction with each other throughout Locke's treatise to weave Locke's conception of political society and political participation.

To begin, Locke argues that legitimate political authority is only possible via the consent of each person rather than through divine right or patriarchy. This is in direct response to the monarchies of England. Locke forwards a conception of the world in which all people are equal according to the natural law, giving no person an automatic right of dominion over another. Dominion and authority can only be established through consent. Universal consent is necessary when establishing a society, Locke states,

meaning that all people entering society must agree. In contrast to express consent, Locke develops the idea of tacit consent when sustaining a government. Locke describes tacit consent by stating that “every man, that hath any possessions, or enjoyment of any part of the dominions of any government, doth thereby give his tacit consent, and is as far forth obliged to obedience to the laws of that government, during such enjoyment, as anyone under it.”<sup>59</sup> This means that all people born into a society, inherently enjoying the benefits and protections of said society, do not need to expressly consent to the government because their participation in the good the society produces presupposes that they are consenting to the laws of the society, otherwise they could not enjoy said benefits. The assertion of tacit consent is a point of contention for many critics of Locke who state that “the account of tacit consent fails to provide a general account of political obligation for those who are not involved in the original establishment of political society, or who do not expressly consent to it through oaths of allegiance.”<sup>60</sup> However, Locke’s insistence that in order for a government to have legitimacy, continued consent is necessary speaks to the importance Locke places on individual power to choose the creation and organization of government and potentially to withdraw consent. Locke argues for the necessity of consent so much so that some have accused him of forwarding the validity of tacit consent merely to bolster his argument of how government can legitimately enforce laws. Meaning, Locke appears to assert the idea of tacit consent in order to legitimize his assertion that consent is always necessary. Still, the continued assertion that consent is essential to a liberal democracy was not lost on the founders of

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<sup>59</sup> Wootton, *Modern Political Thought*. Pg. 319

<sup>60</sup> Kelly, *Locke’s Second Treatise of Government: A Reader’s Guide*. Pg. 110



the United States and whether or not theoretically valid, the idea of tacit consent did have influence upon the liberalism of America.

In order to understand political participation according to Locke, the reasons one would participate politically in Lockean liberal society must be understood. The incentives to participate politically are similar to the incentives to contract into a society in general, that being to protect private property and put in place a neutral arbiter between disputing parties. This explains the responsibility Locke entrusts in citizens and the forms in which people must participate politically. The institution of government is made up of people in a democracy, literally meaning the people rule, and the purpose of this rule is to have an established body that can act as a neutral party to settle disputes. It is up to each person to enforce just relations between members of society. Therefore, when citizens participate politically they must attempt to enforce justice. In balancing the pursuit of self-interests with justice Locke seems to argue that self-interests beget justice, meaning that through the pursuance of self-interest justice is achieved because each person's power will be checked by each other member of the society. This is related to the way Locke formulates human nature.

The purpose for entering a political society and participating politically is three-fold; issues of personal safety, economics, and justice. Locke states,

why [people] choose and authorize a legislative, is, that there may be laws made, and rules set, as guards and fences to the properties of all members of the society: to limit the power, and moderate the dominion, of every part and member of the society.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Wootton, *Modern Political Thought*. Pg. 346

Locke is essentially saying that people ought to be self-interested and participate politically to forward their self-interests. Participating politically ensure that one's own life, as well as personal property are being thought of and secured because the individual in question is advocating for those interests. There is no better advocate for oneself than oneself. Furthermore, participating politically places a check on the power of all others. Locke theorizes that if each person is self-interested, that is a natural check on the individual power of each person, as one person's interests cannot dominate the political arena of everyone if given an equal voice.

Locke is different than many political theorists previous to him in that he places a high premium on the ability and right of the people to dissolve their government if necessary. This right proceeds from the necessity for continued consent in order for a government to exist. Locke does attempt to define rebellion and revolution, which are decidedly different than protest which Locke does not bring up explicitly. He describes rebellion as "being an opposition, not to persons, but authority, which is founded only in the constitutions and laws of the government."<sup>62</sup>

Locke establishes the right to protest, arguing that the people have a right to rebellion when the government in place is in some way authoritarian. He states that "the people generally ill-treated, and contrary to right, will be ready upon any occasion to ease themselves of a burden that sits heavy upon them."<sup>63</sup> Rebellion and revolution are not protest but Locke's discussion of them lead to a theory of protest. In rebellion and

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., Pg. 347

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., Pg. 347

revolution, it is assumed that the leader of a nation in some way has voided their right to rule by betraying or misleading the people, effectively placing the ruler in a state of war with the people. It reasonably follows for Locke that the citizens in this case are allowed and even expected to revolt against this ruler. Locke explicitly states that there are instances when violence against the sitting ruler of the nation is necessary. He states that in a rebellion or revolution where the ruler has placed themselves in a state of war with the citizens, these citizens “must be allowed to strike.”<sup>64</sup> He continues that “he, who opposes the unjust aggressor, has this superiority over him, that he has a right when he prevails, to punish the offender, both for the breach of the peace, and all the evils that followed upon it.”<sup>65</sup>

In analyzing how individuals engage with each other as well as the larger political structure through which political participation takes place, it is necessary to analyze how Locke conceptualizes individual actors. People, for Locke, are defined by their creative and intellectual capacities. He states,

God gave the world to men in common; but since he gave it them for their benefit, and the greatest conveniences of life they were capable to draw from it, it cannot be supposed he meant it should always remain common and uncultivated. He gave it to the use of the industrious and rational... not to the fancy or covetousness of the quarrelsome and contentious.<sup>66</sup>

There are three important descriptions within this statement. The first is that people are industrious, meaning hard-working and capable of creating goods through labor. This is related to the classical economic conception of people as being profit-seeking. For Locke,

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., Pg. 350

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., Pg. 350

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., Pg. 295

all people were meant to be cultivators of the world around them for their benefit and this industrious quality was something to be rewarded. The second point is that people are rational. This is important for Locke because he previously states that natural law is known by people through reason. Describing people as reasonable and rational is necessary for Locke's theory because it prescribes people with a universal and predictable nature. Frequently Locke describes things as rational or understood rationally. The final description of interest is that Locke argues that God did not give the world to the quarrelsome or contentious. That does not mean that people are not occasionally quarrelsome or contentious but it does mean that those who exhibit these qualities will not benefit from society because cooperation is more successful. It is those people who are industrious that will receive the most benefit. Locke establishes that inequality develops naturally, not that it is natural. Rather, inequality arises because those who exhibit beneficial qualities will get more access to goods and those who are contentious will not.

Furthermore, Locke does not conceive of scarcity in the way formal economics does. Specifically, Locke supports individuals taking private property because he does not imagine that this will cause mass inequality. He states, that each person has the ability to take private property for themselves as long as there is "enough, and as good, left in common for others."<sup>67</sup> This means that as long as there is an equal amount of property and as good of property for others in society then there will be no issues with one person taking property for themselves. This illustrates that Locke did not necessarily see scarcity

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., Pg. 293

or competition for resources as a prominent issue for society. However, in coming years the issue of scarce resources becomes one of the most important to society, with the field of economics almost exclusively dealing with the allocation of scarce resources. Locke's blasé attitude towards scarcity also illustrates that he did not conceive competition as a necessary aspect of human behavior. Competition would not be necessary, given that there would likely be enough and as good resources for all people, and rather, humans could utilize exchange in order to improve their profits. Exchange also prevents against spoilage. Therefore, the industriousness of Locke's citizens is marked by their ability to exchange in order to maximize profit.

#### *Liberal Political Participation in Modern America:*

The founders of the United States drew from Locke's writing in stating in the Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."<sup>68</sup> The text continues that in order to secure the aforementioned rights,

Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government.<sup>69</sup>

These two statements display specific concepts within Lockean liberalism that influenced the United States approach to politics as well as political participation. An individual

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<sup>68</sup> "The Declaration of Independence: Full Text," accessed November 14, 2017, <http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/document/>.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

named Charles Braman stated that the Declaration of Independence was written by drawing upon The Virginia Declaration of Rights “which is itself a condensation of nearly all of the major points of the Second Treatise.”<sup>70</sup> The purpose of pointing this out is to legitimize Locke’s influence on political participation as it materialized in the United States, even though, as previously stated, Locke could not have imagined, let alone innumerate, the issues and structures that developed in modern America. First, the U.S. is founded upon the idea of natural rights that are inalienable from individuals no matter the form of government. Second, political authority only legitimately comes from the consent of the individuals being governed, and third, governments purpose is to protect citizens from each other and that if a government is deemed illegitimate it is the right of the people to remove it. The active participation of people in the creation, the governing, and the dissolution of government are hallmarks of Lockean liberal democracy.

The most prominent form of active political participation in the U.S. is through voting in that Locke places express consent, through the act of voting, at the forefront of his theory. Locke foresaw a society in which each person (albeit for Locke this meant land owning white men) are able to vote in decisions concerning the political society. Locke states that the only way political society is created is when “any number of men have so consented to make one community or government.”<sup>71</sup> Locke argues for universal consent first in order to create a society, but majority rule in all decisions that follow.

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<sup>70</sup> Braman, “The Political Philosophy of John Locke, and Its Influence on the Founding Fathers and the Political Documents They Created.”

<sup>71</sup> Wootton, *Modern Political Thought*. Pg. 312

This is illustrated in an American context through the voting process. Citizens are able to vote in their own representatives as well as vote on specific policy, usually at the local level. Universal consent, meaning every person agreeing on a decision, has never been the case in America but the ideals behind voting have remained constant and grounded in Locke that it is necessary for citizens to have a say in how the government is ran.

The successive most prominent form of political participation is protest. As previously stated, Locke does not explicitly discuss protest, however his discussion of the right to dissent, revolution, and rebellion can be expanded to inform a right to protest generally. When a lawmaker does not fulfill their duty to their citizenry then the citizenry has the right to disrupt the natural order and attempt to right that lawmakers wrong. Rebellion and revolution are only proportional to the most egregious offenses, so a minor offense, not deserving of the complete overthrow of the government, may at least necessitate protest. The United States founders obviously took this into account, engaging both in protest and largescale rebellion in order to overthrow the British government. Locke would support protest in modern day society because it is each citizen right to protest legislation and individuals that they consider abhorrent to their community, of which they are the final authority of. Granted, Locke would not support a protest regarding a minor governmental infraction, first because he valued the stability of the political society, and second because he did not think people would be easily bothered by political actions and that it is only large infractions that cause the wrath of the public. Although, what constitutes a minor issue is arbitrary. Locke reserves the right to protest and the right to rebellion to those infractions that are most serious.

A construction of political participation in Lockean imagined liberalism therefore would appear as follows: each member of society would actively engage with the government through multiple avenues of political participation, most prominently voting for representatives that support the self-interests of citizens. In the U.S. those citizens who can vote is expanded to all people above 18 notwithstanding they have committed a federal crime. Citizens self-interests would revolve around issues of bodily integrity, economic protection, and justice. In particular, the government's purpose would be to protect citizens in the most basic sense and ensure that no person is being taken advantage of by another. The government's problematic, meaning the problem that it is tasked with solving or accomplishing, is continued justice in the political society. The responsibility of citizens is to keep the government honest in this job. The right to protest when the government sways from its given task is not only permitted but encouraged. Therefore, both active voting and active protest are concrete duties of the polity in continuing the legitimacy of a government in Lockean liberalism. The subject is a self-interested individual seeking justice above all else. The institutions open to this citizen is voting first and foremost. Secondly the institutions open to the citizens are the public spaces that allow for grievances to be aired to representatives or other individuals with power.

*Neoliberalism as a Modifying Factor to Liberal Political Participation:*

The neoliberal subject is not markedly different from the liberal subject. In an analysis of the liberal subject and the neoliberal subject few things appear to be different between one to the other at first, and any changes that do exist appear innocuous at first.



This is because neoliberalism is not its own ideological entity, entirely separate from liberalism, rather, neoliberalism is a rationality that uses the existing structures, concepts, and relationships present in liberalism as a vehicle to deliver its new value system. That is to say, liberalism acts as the vehicle upon which neoliberalism rides, overlaid on top, not conspicuously changing the original inputs but altering the destination. The old elements of liberalism remain but neoliberalism causes them to manifest differently, delivering patently different effects than liberalism. It works with liberalism's modes of operation, but shifts the values and the accepted forms of actions of the subject in slight ways. The neoliberal subject can still be considered self-interested and industrious as Locke describes. What changes is how the subject conceives of themselves within the greater structure of society. This change alters what the subject considers to be valuable, and the actions that can be used to achieve that value. The actions employed by the neoliberal subject then alter the institutions and structures of political participation, shaping them with neoliberal reason causing these institutions to reinforce neoliberal values back onto the citizenry reflexively.

The motivations of the neoliberal subject are one's self-interest, just as for the liberal subject, but what is valuable, what is considered to be integral to working for oneself is altered through neoliberalism. The subject is now governed by an interest in accumulating capital, not just for oneself, but for the macroeconomic government. The subject no longer orients themselves solely as an owner of means of production, or a laborer, but as material themselves; capital in flesh to be amassed. Specifically, humans

are redefined as human capital, an entrepreneur of themselves and as input for the profit maximization of the firm. Brown comments on this shift stating,

As neoliberal rationality remakes the human being as human capital, an earlier rendering of homo oeconomicus as an interest maximizer gives way to a formulation of the subject as both a member of a firm and as itself a firm, and in both cases as appropriately conducted by the governance practices appropriate to firms.”<sup>72</sup>

In this quotation, a firm refers specifically to the economic conception of a business that attempts to profit maximize through production and investment. In saying that an individual is both a member of a firm and a firm themselves she means that the commonplace strategies used by a firm to profit maximize are employed by individuals to increase their own profits as well as the profits of the firm they work for, thereby increasing the macroeconomic bottom line. That is to say, the acts of both production and investment are adopted by individuals and given a personal nature; production of skills in the self, investment in skills in the self. Brown states that human capitals “are constrained by markets in both inputs and outputs to comport themselves in ways that will outperform the competition and to align themselves with good assessments about where those markets may be going.”<sup>73</sup>

This shift in the conception of the self does not appear, on its face, to necessarily create drastic changes in action, as self-interest is still the driving force of human political action. The change is seen more clearly in the way people orient themselves within the greater system. When everyone is human capital, then each person takes on the responsibility to self-appreciate as a unit of human capital, to become more marketable.

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<sup>72</sup> Brown, *Undoing the Demos*. Pg. 34

Because of this, the opportunity to self-appreciate said to be is available to any, and the inability to succeed in self-appreciation is chalked up to poor entrepreneurial practice. Furthermore, class structures are not so clearly defined in this reformulation of humanity. Brown argues;

when everything is capital, labor disappears as a category, as does its collective form, class, taking with it the analytic basis for alienation, exploitation, and association among laborers. Dismantled at the same time is the very rationale for unions, consumer groups, and other forms of economic solidarity apart from cartels among capitals.<sup>74</sup>

As stated, conceptualized as human capital, individuals attempt to self-appreciate, meaning to increase the value of their human stock by gaining marketable skills so they become more valuable to potential employers. Profit-maximization, the universal neoclassical economic end, is still present and thriving within each individual's cost-benefit decision-making process. In the prior quotation Brown states that labor, as a category, disappears. This harkens back to the idea that people no longer conceptualize themselves as either owners of production or as laborers. Inputs into production are physical capital and human capital. The dialectic that Marx describes, of bourgeoisie and proletariat, cannot be as easily ascertained through this new system of individualized human capitals. The class consciousness Marx hoped to foster in the proletariat is also not so easily wrought, as there is no community in human capital. That is to say, the lines of exploitation could be clearly drawn during liberal capitalism and Marx focuses on this with his base superstructure theory, pointing out how owners of capital use the labor of the proletariat to amass more wealth while individuals are alienated from the objects they

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., Pg. 109

produce. In neoliberal capitalism, everyone considers themselves to be a capitalist in that they own their own bodies and therefore can invest in themselves and produce themselves as a more competitive input in production. There are no laborers, only wealthy capitalists and capitalist that are not wealthy yet but will be.

Humans are also highly competitive. Locke's liberalism conceives of human economic actors as actors of exchange, not necessarily of competition. Neoliberalism, being an injection of economic thought into political analysis, the theory of scarcity present in micro and macroeconomics becomes imbedded in political thought and humans become reimagined not of actors of exchange but decidedly actors in competition with each other, looking to not only profit maximize but to gain lucrative scarce positions in firms. Brown and Foucault agree that in neoliberalism competition is not natural but is normative. Foucault states "Competition is not the result of natural interplay of appetites, instincts, behavior..." but rather is encouraged in neoliberal subjects. Brown supplements arguing that neoliberalism "must be continuously supported and corrected from outside."<sup>75</sup> Whereas liberals see exchange and profit maximization as natural and therefore government ought not to interfere with it, neoliberals see competition as necessary but not natural and therefore must be cultivated by outside actors, the government. Foucault sees this change as detrimental and argues that "the more we move towards an economic state, the more paradoxically, the constitutive bond of civil society

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., Pg. 38

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., Pg. 63

is weakened and the more the individual is isolated by the economic bond he has with everyone and anyone.”<sup>76</sup>

Applied to political participation, the neoliberal subject is stripped of its political motivations and endowed with purely economic interests. In neoliberalism the goals of action are given, these ends being profit maximization. When profit maximization is given the motivations for any action stem from profit maximization. Every realm of society becomes a means to an economic ends. Politics and political participation are seen as a way to achieve one's self-interests but self-interests are defined through primarily economic terms. Therefore, politics is simply a means to an economic ends. Again, this does not appear on its face to be starkly different from liberalism as Locke seems to argue that political participation is useful in order to ensure that one's property, starting with one's life and extending to one's possessions, are protected. Furthermore, Locke states that people are industrious and that joining a political society in the first place relates heavily to personal economic interests. This illustrates that Locke recognizes that political participation achieves economic ends. However, in neoliberalism the notion of political participation as a tool to economic ends intensifies as political participation becomes a means to accumulate wealth solely. The other ends described by Locke drop out of consciousness in neoliberal society. Political participation lacks an imperative to enforce justice. Each individual desires not just protection of property but an increase in the wealth of property even if this increase causes a detriment for others. This is partially because the field of classical economics does not concern itself with justice at all,

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<sup>76</sup> Foucault and Senellart, *The Birth of Biopolitics*. Pg. 303

meaning that the goal of a free market is simply to allocate resources efficiently regardless of if that allocation is just or not. Brown argues, “homo oeconomicus approaches everything as a market and knows only market conduct; it cannot think public purposes or common problems in a distinctly political way.”<sup>77</sup> When individuals take on neoliberal rationality and reframe the world around them in economic terms, concepts like efficiency and growth outweigh concepts such as justice and sustainability. She continues stating that this formulation

means that democratic state commitments to equality, liberty, inclusion, and constitutionalism are now subordinate to the project of economic growth, competitive positioning, and capital enhancement. These political commitments can no longer stand on their own legs and, the speech implies, would be jettisoned if found to abate rather than abet, economic goals.”<sup>78</sup>

The assertion that economic rationality does not contain a conception of justice is further supported by pure economic theory. In the field of microeconomics, the stated goal is for supply of a certain good to equal demand of a certain good. That is market equilibrium and is also perfect efficiency. The goal is not for the most people to have access to said good, nor is the goal to have the poorest people have preferred access to a good. The goal is simply to use resources as efficiently as possible, keeping costs low and profit high. Justice is not the problematic of economic thought and decision-making. The consequence of neoliberalism is that economic thought is substituting out all other forms of thought. This is an imperfect replacement. Economic thought entering the political arena and choking out political decision-making means that the field of politics now lacks

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<sup>77</sup> Brown, *Undoing the Demos*. Pg. 39

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., Pg. 26-27

a conception of justice. Politics is marked by efficiency and profit maximization. Political participation the modus operandi for an extension of the economic system.

As stated before, the change in individual conceptions of self that neoliberalism facilitates is illustrated more clearly in the way people interact with larger economic systems. Since profit maximization takes over as the primary goal for all forms of action, economic or other, profit maximization takes over as the primary goal of political action. Locke argued that political action did three important things that benefit the individual, those being securing the protection of one's own life, one's physical property, and establishing a neutral arbiter between parties. Neoliberalism sacrifices the premium placed on one's own life and on a neutral arbiter for the goals of protecting and growing physical property. Said another way, whereas Locke placed each of these benefits on a single tier, equally important and equally accomplished through contracting into a political society, neoliberalism places protection of objects above any other benefits. Marx is helpful in this discussion in that Marx pointed out the physical detriments to laborers during their capitalist production. The hunched over backs, the damaged lungs, these are examples of how capitalism sacrificed bodily integrity for profit maximization. Neoliberalism plays into this process, but allows for the furthering of non-economic goals, such as the betterment of human health, only when this betterment allows for more efficient production. In the United States, there is little question that people will sacrifice aspects of their health in order to keep up in the competitive workplace, visible in the hours individuals work and the various known detriments both physical labor and white-collar careers cause people.

Neoliberalism's defining difference is that each individualized human capital's goal is not only do profit maximize for themselves but also to profit maximize for the national government. Brown states,

We are human capital not just for ourselves, but also for the firm, state, or postnational constellation of which we are members. Thus, even as we are tasked with being responsible for ourselves in a competitive world of other human capitals, insofar as we are human capital for firms or states concerned with their own competitive positioning, we have no guarantee of security protection, or even survival.<sup>79</sup>

In literal terms, this refers to the commonplace measures of success in economics such as Gross Domestic Product, Gross Domestic Product per capita, and unemployment rate.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) "is the monetary value of all the finished goods and services produced within a country's borders in a specific time period."<sup>80</sup> GDP per capita is that per each person in the nation. When the bulk of individuals are employed and when firms are producing and moving a lot of product, their monetary gains are aggregated into these economic indicators which the government then takes ownership for. Said another way, the United States government is considered to be responsible for economic vitality and takes credit for large GDP, and large GDP is an aggregate of the bottom lines of firms, which are in turn a product of inputs, such as human capital.

Human capital is directly responsible for the health of the economy which the government takes credit for. Brown argues

homo politicus in modernity is simultaneously rooted in individual sovereignty and signals the promise of social, political and legal respect for it. When homo politicus fades and the figure of human capital takes its place, no longer is each

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., Pg. 37

<sup>80</sup> Troy Segal, "Gross Domestic Product - GDP," Investopedia, November 19, 2003, <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/g/gdp.asp>.



entitled to “pursue his own good in his own way,” as Mill famously put the matter. No longer is there an open question of what one wants from life or how one might wish to craft the self, Human capitals, like all other capitals, are constrained by markets in both inputs and outputs to comport themselves in ways that will outperform the competition and to align themselves with good assessments about where those markets may be going.<sup>81</sup>

Foucault’s description is even more insidious, arguing that this comportment of human capital makes citizens a tool of the state. He argues that homo oeconomicus follows neoliberal rationality and who accepts the reality around them. He states,

Rational conduct is any conduct which is sensitive to modifications in the variables of the environment and which responds to this in non-random way, in a systematic way, and economics can therefore be defined as the science of the systematic nature of responses to environmental variables”<sup>82</sup>

Said another way, this means that the government can insert an artificial variable into the life of a citizen in some way in order to spur certain action from that citizen, effectively controlling them for the purpose of the state. This is where Foucault’s analysis becomes imperative because a neoliberal citizens conception of self is benefiting someone, and Foucault would say it benefits both political and economic elites, which in neoliberalism are almost indistinguishable.

A construction of political participation in modern day neoliberal society therefore would appear as follows: members of society are encouraged to further their self-interests, specifically profit-seeking interests, in all realms of society, particularly the political. Although neoliberalism tout’s equality of participation, just as liberalism does, neoliberalism places the responsibility of involvement solely upon the citizen and does not put mechanisms in place to ensure that each person has equal access to political

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<sup>81</sup> Brown, *Undoing the Demos*. Pg. 109

participatory institutions. The political is a tool for profit-seeking and any political systems, voting or otherwise, can be utilized as such. The responsibility of citizens is to protect themselves and promotes themselves above other competitors, ensuring that each individual is self-appreciating the most, allowing for businesses to be more competitive in turn, growing the macroeconomic economy. The duties of the State and representatives of the State is to represent this interest of the people and to also promote a competitive profit-seeking environment. Protest is not encouraged because it cuts in to bottom lines (if you are protesting you are not working; the opportunity cost of protest is engaging in an activity that grows one's human capital). The only time protest is allowable is when doing so makes one more marketable, perhaps through the social status of being politically engaged. The government is not permitted to interfere with the economic rights of individuals. Social laws can be implemented unless they interfere with business activity. Voting is encouraged but one cannot miss work for it. Only those politicians who are actively growing the economy ought to be voted in. Political participation is not necessitated as a healthy democracy is denoted through strong per capita GDP primarily and as long as that is happening the government is doing its task.

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<sup>82</sup> Foucault and Senellart, *The Birth of Biopolitics*. Pg. 269

### **Chapter Three: Neoliberal Rationality's Concrete Effects**

To glean how neoliberalism affects political participation in action it is helpful to look at policy put in place by legislators that is opposed by the majority of citizens to the point where the citizens act to change it. Doing this allows for my analysis to reveal a rift between an existent or proposed policy and what the majority of the public would like it to be. Beyond this, looking to a policy in which is changed only after corporations get involved illustrates the inflation of corporate interference in politics. This influence has invaded the institutions of power in government, which has fundamentally changed the systems of political participation in the United States. Analyzing these shifts in the realm of political participation acts as a microcosm of democracy overall, allowing for a detailed analysis which has implications on the fabric of American society. Focusing on political participation the, this increase in corporate influence in politics displays four important effects of neoliberalism, the first being that it changes the theoretical underpinning of a political argument. Second, it alters the role of the citizen and the role of the government, as well as their relationship to each other. Third, it changes the kinds of political actions that cause policy change and the modes of political participation universally, fundamentally shifting who has political power in the United States. These shifts, first in theory, then in action, feedback into the polity to reinforce the original shifts in theory, perpetuating the spread of neoliberal rationality.

### *Changes in Political Calculus and its Affects:*

Regarding the change in the theoretical underpinning of political arguments, the clearest example of neoliberal rationality has been the reaction to what are colloquially called bathroom bill's, or bills that would bar transgender individuals from using a public bathroom appropriate to their gender identity. This issue is not explicitly about economics and is more so an issue representing an ideological divide in the U.S. about what identities ought to be acceptable. Whether or not a transgender individual is able to use the bathroom of their choice does not immediately make clear how this would affect the economy. However, it is precisely these types of value-based legislation and ideals that neoliberal rationality skews through an economic lens, altering how the issues are thought of by both the government and the citizenry.

North Carolina passed a now infamous "bathroom bill" called HB2, and the backlash that followed elevated it to national news. Although citizens pleaded against and protested the bill, the largely Republican government did not budge. Preliminarily, public discussion regarding the bill stayed within the confines of value legislation, meaning that more conservative arguments centered on traditional gender roles and more progressive arguments centered on an egalitarian and identity-accepting approach to governance. It was clear through this debate that most of the fervor was generated from the side opposing the bill. Republican State Senator Jeff Tarte told *The Guardian*, "At least 70% of people in North Carolina now believe that HB2 hurts the state and they don't agree

with it.”<sup>83</sup> However, as time went on with no clear movement towards a repeal the rhetoric surrounding the bill changed to be more impersonal and economic in nature. Pathos, or an appeal to passion and values, was set aside to make room for logos, an appeal to the logic of legislators that HB2 would cause many tangible, economic costs without many benefits. Said another way, legislators were called to be rational actors in the economic sense in their decision-making concerning HB2.

The main driver of this shift in political calculus was corporations entering the political discussion, who sided with the majority of citizens against HB2. Corporate leaders from PayPal, Dow Chemical, Adidas, the N.C.A.A., and many others publicly stated their support for the repeal of the bill, some vowing to pull out of North Carolina entirely, which would effectively cost the state billions if the bill was not repealed. Although publicly supporting citizens and gay and trans rights advocates, the reasoning used by those corporations had an explicit economic bent. That is to say, the rationality employed that underpinned the argument against the bill was economic in nature. An amicus brief written about the case of HB2 and publicly supported by 68 corporations advocated “for the corporations’ transgender employees and customers and [argued] HB2 is undermining their ability to do business both within and outside the Tar Heel State.”<sup>84</sup> The brief also gained support from leading transgender activists who echoed that the economic cost is why North Carolina ought to overturn HB2. Mara Keisling, executive

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<sup>83</sup> Joanna Walters, “North Carolina ‘bathroom Bill’ Blocking LGBT Protections Unlikely to See Repeal,” the Guardian, December 23, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/dec/23/north-carolina-lgbt-bathroom-hb2-repeal>.

<sup>84</sup> “Major Corporations Join Fight Against North Carolina’s ‘Bathroom Bill,’” NBC News, accessed January 29, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/major-corporations-join-fight-against-north-carolina-s-bathroom-bill-n605976>.

director of the National Center for Transgender Equality, stated that HB2 is "terrible for businesses and employees."<sup>85</sup>

This phenomenon of value-based legislation being reframed in economic terms by both the government and corporations was apparent in other states as well. For example, Texas also attempted to pass a "bathroom bill" but was not able, due to widespread objection by businesses. The case of the Texas bill is perhaps the most conspicuous example of neoliberal logic at work. When Texan legislators introduced the bill, that would limit the restrooms and changing rooms people could access based on the sex they were assigned at birth, multiple business leaders wrote a letter stating their opposition to the bill. Within the letter it stated, "we also have ample evidence of the long-term economic harm that these so-called 'bathroom bills' will cause."<sup>86</sup> The letter continued that the businesses were concerned about their own competitiveness stating, "no industry will remain untouched by the unnecessary harm that discriminatory laws will do to our competitiveness, to our ability to attract talent."<sup>87</sup> That is to say, it was business leaders who were able to make the political change pertaining to a piece of values legislation. This is because decision-making hinges upon an economic analysis. Other motives exist, but the economic one is the loudest. This assigning of economic value to progressive topics does not stop at the state level. Brown discusses how President Barack Obama employed neoliberalism while he was in office. During President Obama's second

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Laura McGaughy, "Uber, PepsiCo, PayPal and JPMorgan Chase Are Latest Businesses to Oppose Texas Bathroom Bill | Texas Legislature | Dallas News," accessed January 3, 2018, <https://www.dallasnews.com/news/texas-legislature/2017/08/03/uber-pepsico-paypal-jpmorgan-chase-latest-businesses-oppose-texas-bathroom-bill>.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

inauguration speech he discussed the various progressive policies he intended to push during his following four years, and the speech was lauded by Democrats for being one of the most progressive inauguration speeches ever given. Yet Brown points out that “every progressive value – from decreasing domestic violence to slowing climate change – Obama represented as not merely reconcilable with economic growth, but as driving it.”<sup>88</sup> The fact that economic growth has become so commonplace in progressive discussions illustrates that neoliberalism causes a shift in thought undergone by individual subjects. This shift within individual hearts and minds is the backbone to how neoliberalism alters political participation.

*Changes in the Relationship of the Citizen to the Government:*

This individual change begets a secondary individual change, namely, how the subject in a democracy perceives of themselves and their role as related to their government, as well as the government’s role as related to them. Within the economic framing of the previous arguments against these “bathroom bills” is a continued reference to the “transgender worker” and “transgender consumer”. Businesses’ arguments revolved around the economic importance of having transgender individuals both buy from the corporations in question and work for the corporations in question. Transgender people were reduced, as everyone is, to human capital. Although the corporations appeared to support progressive policies they did not do so based on an egalitarian philosophy towards governance or the principles enshrined in the U.S. founding documents and instead based their calculations on their own bottom line. The references

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<sup>88</sup> Brown, *Undoing the Demos*. Pg. 25

to transgender individuals as such is not as important as the reference to workers and consumers. It is those economic units, someone who can be employed and someone who can spend money, that define individuals for both corporations and the government.

The conceptualization of individuals as human capital is not seen in only “bathroom bill” legislation. Another value issue in which the reduction of citizens to economic units is visible in discussions of immigration, in particular the debate surrounding Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) recipients. The debate surrounding DACA has been reduced to the role of the immigrant within the economy, specifically, if an immigrant is helpful or hurtful to the economy. This is a reduction of an individual to their role as an economic unit, a unit of human capital, as their most consequential identity. Each person inhabits many identities but it is the economic identity that concerns both corporations and the government and shapes public discourse about the issue. DACA is an Obama era policy that shields “from deportation people who were brought into the United States as children.”<sup>89</sup> Those who argue in support of the provision state that it allows individuals who were brought to the United States as children “to participate in the job market and contribute to the economy is a benefit for everyone.”<sup>90</sup> Those who argue against it, such as Attorney General Jeff Sessions, state that those who have benefited from the program have ended up denying jobs “to hundreds of thousands of Americans by allowing those same illegal aliens to take those

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<sup>89</sup> “What Is DACA? Who Are the Dreamers? Here Are Some Answers - The New York Times,” accessed January 29, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/23/us/daca-dreamers-shutdown.html>.

<sup>90</sup> “DACA: Arguments Being Made For and Against Reform | Fortune,” accessed January 29, 2018, <http://fortune.com/2018/01/25/trump-daca-citizenship/>.



jobs.”<sup>91</sup> These statements represent two common takes on immigration, yet both are placed in an economic framework.

Broadening out to immigration reform more generally, President Trump has been an outspoken advocate for a merit-based system of immigration. This is not necessarily unusual but does shed light on the extremity and prominence of human capital as the primary conception of how individuals are evaluated. President Trump stated that a merit based system “will save countless dollars, raise workers' wages and help struggling families.”<sup>92</sup> This is presumably because the country will be accepting only immigrants with high level skills and education, as opposed to less skilled individuals who can undercut wages by accepting lower paying jobs. President Trump continued, “I am not going to let America and its great companies and workers, be taken advantage of anymore.”<sup>93</sup> Once again, the logic here is that a merit-based system would reward immigrants who are more educated and can contribute more to a company. This shows that the various identities that make up a human, their family, their culture, their place of origin, their religion, their education, etc., are all merely factors that set up their economic potential. As further evidence of a reduction of the individual to human capital, the author of the CNBC article that quotes President Trump’s statements about a possible merit based immigration system ended with this statement: “Technology companies and others have expressed concern that a restrictive immigration policy could hamper their

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<sup>91</sup> “FACT CHECK: Are DACA Recipients Stealing Jobs Away From Other Americans?,” NPR.org, accessed January 3, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/2017/09/06/548882071/fact-check-are-daca-recipients-stealing-jobs-away-from-other-americans>.

<sup>92</sup> Dan Mangan, “Trump Calls for Merit-Based Immigration System in Congress Speech,” February 28, 2017, <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/02/28/trump-calls-for-merit-based-immigration-system-in-congress-speech.html>.

ability to hire desirable candidates for jobs.”<sup>94</sup> This illustrates that, although the author attempted to include both sides of the immigration debate, both arguments centered around what would benefit corporations the most.

With these theoretical changes in political argumentation and human evaluation in place, returning to Foucault is helpful in illuminating how neoliberalism alters the role of the citizen in a democracy. Foucault claims that neoliberalism and the conception of human capital represents two processes. One process is that it gives an economic interpretation of non-economic phenomenon, described previously as an economic rationality which is used to make decisions pertaining to value legislation. The other process is “the extension of economic analysis into a previously unexplored domain.”<sup>95</sup> The theory of human capital allows for economic theory to enter various realms that humans inhabit, that have previously been thought not economic. DACA is an example of this because the identity of an individual being an immigrant is no longer being dismissed, as it is an important aspect in that individual, insofar as it makes that individual economically competitive.

The outcome of an individual being alienated in a more comprehensive way than merely liberal capitalist alienation is interesting because it is the opposite outcome of both the intent of conceptualizing people as human capital and the portrayal of human capital by corporations. Foucault traced the genealogy of the concept human capital and states that the rise of describing people as human capital in economic discussions was so

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Foucault and Senellart, *The Birth of Biopolitics*. Pg. 219

that “the individual, to use the classical and fashionable terminology of their time, is not alienated from his work environment, from the time of his life, from his household, his family, and from the natural environment.”<sup>96</sup> The thinking regarding this was that the acknowledgment of human capital allowed for a more complex conception of the individual, expanding them from someone who works for a period of time and can be replaced by anyone else, to an individual with a unique background and skill set useful to the production process. However, even when the individual is conceived more complexly than simply as a worker, each of their complexities is perceived through an economic lens. Yes, they are afforded more definable characteristics, but the value of those characteristics is determined through an economic cost benefit analysis. Foucault continues discussing human capital saying, “the return to the enterprise is therefore at once an economic policy or a policy of the economization of the entire social field, of an extension of the economy to the entire social field.”<sup>97</sup>

Marx discusses how a person is alienated from the object they produce during industrial production. This is not identical to the process of alienation in modern day United States because of the predominance of service industry jobs versus industrial production jobs as well as the advancement in technology that has altered normal working conditions, but it does give insight into how the objects of production become dominant over those who create them. Marx states that,

the more the worker appropriates the external world and sensuous nature through his labor, the more he deprives himself of the means of life in two respects: first,

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., Pg. 242

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., Pg. 242

that the sensuous external world gradually ceases to be an object belonging to his labor, a means of life of his work; secondly, that it gradually ceases to be a means of life in the immediate sense, a means of physical subsistence of the worker.<sup>98</sup>

Marx is describing the process in which certain actions are no longer done by the worker, for the worker, as an example of the workers dominion over their environment, but rather, actions become necessary simply to subsist. The worker then has a warped view of and warped relationship with the external world. Marx describes this as alienation. This can be expanded into the conception of human capital because human capital frames all aspects of human life into an economic calculus. So just as Marx states that the sensuous world stops being a means for life for an individual and becomes an object that controls the person so does all aspects of life for modern human capital. Any social interaction, family experience, religious orientation, geographic upbringing, and ethnic heritage, as well as any other that can be thought of, is something that either can be exploited to gain employment or something that must be stifled to maintain competitiveness. In this way the alienation that Marx describes enters more spheres than Marx originally imagined. This is an extension of alienation into all kinds of actions not merely production actions. That is to say, actions such as religious worship, relationships and marriage, and political actions are no longer something that are constituted by the person acting. The actions now constitute the actor. The actions make up the important aspects of the person because they alter their economic competitiveness. This is different than people engaging with various actions because the individuals have instilled importance in them and control the outcome.

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<sup>98</sup> Wootton, *Modern Political Thought*. Pg. 767

The difference between alienation during Marx time and alienation currently is most apparent in the fact that Marx acknowledged that individuals did have downtime in which they were not alienated from the world around them; those moments when a worker was not on the production line. Marx states, “the worker, therefore feels at ease only outside work, and during work he is outside himself. He is at home when he is not working and when he is working he is not at home.”<sup>99</sup> In modern neoliberal America this down time, where an individual is not connected with production, does not exist. There are two reasons for this. First, modern production in a post industrialized nation looks very different than the industrial revolution. There are innumerable ways and reasons this is the case but put simply, manual labor on a production line is no longer the most common form of work. The work that most individuals in the united states are doing is not relegated to a factory but rather can follow the worker home. Particularly with the increase in technology, such as smart phones, people are rarely off the clock. The second reason down time as Marx discusses no longer exists is because the neoliberal conception of the individual, as human capital, has infiltrated spheres of life previously thought to be not work related. Just as Marx states that when someone isn’t working they are at ease, this illustrates that he conceives of spheres untouched by work. However, in neoliberalism all aspects of an individual, their family life, their education, their ethnic background, and any other identity they may hold, are considered something that can either benefit or hinder their economic prowess. Even when a worker is at home there is

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., Pg. 768

no longer an opportunity for them to turn off their economic analysis. It is always present and determines the choices they make.

Human capital, then, represents an extension and an intensification of the process of alienation as Marx describes it. Alienation still occurs in the ways that Marx lays out, which are alienation from the body, alienation from action and interaction with nature, alienation from the community, and alienation from the other person. Each of these forms of alienation swells and amplifies in neoliberalism. The two forms of alienation most clearly affected by neoliberalism is the second and fourth, alienation from action and interaction with nature, and alienation from the other person. As described earlier, actions previously thought to be unrelated to the production process are now considered to be central to the process of production, so any action can be perceived to either further or inhibit one's economic standing. Actions cease to be something controlled by the individual, but rather, something that controls the individual. When ends are dictated to someone, meaning when value is established universally as economic competitiveness and this value is given to people as their only ends, then the choices of actions someone can make are all but determined for them because they will choose the actions that gets them closer to this goal of economic competitiveness.

The fourth form of alienation, alienation from the other person, means that people become exploitive of each other in capitalist society. Humans are used as means to an end. Marx saw this on a large scale with the bourgeoisie exploiting proletariat workers but also on a small scale that, in order to get ahead, people would exploit each other. In the form of an idiom, if you're not first you're last. This is expanded in neoliberalism in

that people's social interactions are thought of as a form of social currency. The person opposite you in any given situation can be dissected in terms of how they help you economically. Are they of a similar social and economic stratum as you? Who do they know? Who do they know that would be beneficial for you to know? These questions are reductive of what personal relationships ought to be. Each unit of human capital, although complex as previously described, is still reduced to an economic stepping stone.

Furthermore, this concept of neoliberal alienation as something larger and more intrusive than the alienation Marx described analyzed in a purely political realm to deepen an understanding of political alienation. First, the action of participating politically for Locke is something to establish justice for oneself as well as all of mankind. However now, political participation the political issues "worth" getting involved in for a neoliberal are economically skewed. The questions are whether or not a piece of legislation will benefit the individual economically and whether or not it will benefit the United States economically. The second aspect is that people are alienated from their political process. This constitutes one of the most significant changes neoliberalism has on political participation and democracy. In Lockean liberal democracy the rulers of the political process are the people who are actively creating legislation and participating politically to ensure justice and prosperity for all and guard against tyranny. Ultimately, each citizen is supposed to be the owner of the political process, and political participation is the production aspect of politics. Yet under neoliberal rationality, when each person is human capital rather than a political citizen, the political actions human capital participates in are actions outside of themselves that either increase their ability

for survival by making them economically competitive or decrease their ability for survival by hindering them economically. Marx argues that in capitalism the action of production becomes something alien to the individual because it is a forced action the proletariat do to subsist. This is not unlike the currently political process. Human capital, of which every aspect is viewed through an economic lens, no longer is a master of their political process as Locke would have it. The process is something that must be done in order to ensure economic competitiveness.

#### *Changes in Successful Political Action and its Affects:*

Due to the change in the relationship between the government and its citizens caused by neoliberal rationality, the kinds of actions employed by citizens that successfully force a change in public policy are altered dramatically. As the previous sections stated, neoliberalism changes the theoretical conditions of political arguments and alters the role and relationship of citizen to government. The effect of these two changes can be expanded out to the entire system of political participation, changing the modes of successful participation entirely. The individuals acting in a democracy are altered substantially enough that their motivations to act are changed from that of classic Lockean liberal society, and the actors with power over political change also shifts. People change, and the structures people create follow. The modes of political participation most often employed in the United States reflect neoliberal rationality.

To begin, in Lockean liberalism each person has equal power to change politics. Although Locke wrote in a time when all people clearly did not have equal political



power due to race, gender, and whether or not they owned land, the ideals of Lockean liberalism are central to American political thought. As stated previously, Lockean political participation would exhibit the qualities of active engagement by all citizens through voting and reasonable protest, working for the ends of protection of individual rights and establishment of justice. The institutions reflecting this ideal would be free and fair elections as well as an open public space and discourse through which political disagreements and protests can occur. Finally, the government would show responsiveness to the votes and protests of the people, fulfilling the most basic definition of democracy, being that the people rule.

Moving on to an analysis of present day political participatory institutions to glean the way they deviate from a Lockean system. Voting has deviated greatly from what Locke would have had it be, and from what it used to be in the United States, largely due to various restrictive and discriminatory voter laws such as voter ID laws, limits on same day registration, and early voting cutbacks. The ACLU reports that “in the 2016 presidential election, up to 17 states may have restrictive voting laws in place.”<sup>100</sup>. To put this kind of ratcheting up of voter ID laws in perspective, “before 2006, no state required photo identification to vote on Election Day. Today 10 states have this requirement. All told, a total of 33 states — representing more than half the nation’s population — have some version of voter identification rules on the books.”<sup>101</sup> These

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<sup>100</sup> “Voter Suppression Laws: What’s New Since the 2012 Presidential Election,” American Civil Liberties Union, accessed February 11, 2018, <https://www.aclu.org/map/voter-suppression-laws-whats-new-2012-presidential-election>.

<sup>101</sup> Zoltan L. Hajnal, Nazita Lajevardi, and Lindsay Nielson, “Analysis | Do Voter Identification Laws Suppress Minority Voting? Yes. We Did the Research.,” *Washington Post*, February 15, 2017, sec. Monkey

restrictions have caused a drop in voter turnout, particularly in marginalized groups such as people of color and those at or under the poverty line. This was found to be true in many states, for example “in 2012, turnout dropped 1.9 percent in Kansas and 2.2 percent in Tennessee, two states which had recently implemented voter restrictions.”<sup>102</sup>

Furthermore, in a study done by the Washington Post, voter ID laws were found to “have a disproportionate effect on minorities, which is exactly what you would expect given that members of racial and ethnic minorities are less apt to have valid photo ID.”<sup>103</sup>

This issue of suppressing voter turnout has been exasperated by the landmark Supreme Court case of *Citizens United v. Federal Elections Commission*, 558 U.S. 310 (2010), a quintessential example of how neoliberal rationality alters not only individuals, but entire political structures. The case of *Citizens United* involved a non-profit association that created a documentary about Hillary Clinton set to run on cable providers before the 2008 democratic primary. The question central to the case was whether or not funds from the treasury of a corporation could be used to publicly promote a political opinion. The ruling, in favor of the non-profit Citizens United, overturned years of regulation on how and which corporate funds could be spent on a political message. The majority opinion, authored by Justice Anthony Kennedy, explained the decision by using an extended economic metaphor. He said that government ought not interfere with the

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Cage Analysis. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/02/15/do-voter-identification-laws-suppress-minority-voting-yes-we-did-the-research/>.

<sup>102</sup> “I (Wish I) Voted,” US News & World Report, accessed February 15, 2018, <https://www.usnews.com/news/the-report/articles/2016-04-01/voting-restrictions-are-impacting-elections>.

<sup>103</sup> Hajnal, Lajevardi, and Nielson, “Analysis | Do Voter Identification Laws Suppress Minority Voting?”

“open marketplace”<sup>104</sup> of ideas. Explaining public discourse as a marketplace of ideas displays that Justice Kennedy viewed the issue of political speech from an economic standpoint. As he continued it became apparent that he, as well as Chief Justice Roberts, Justice Scalia, Justice Thomas, and Justice Alito, were basing their opinion on a reimagined world in which all realms of both private and public life could be construed as a marketplace.

Most notably, Justice Kennedy equates spending money with public speech. He does so for two reasons. First, he redefines corporations as people in the eyes of the Court. This is because, under his logic, an association of individuals organized to be a corporation ought to be guaranteed the same exact rights as an individual person, and that organizing into a corporation and amassing funds in a treasury is not reason enough to impose election contribution regulations in a different way than it is imposed on individuals. Justice Kennedy stated that on those grounds The Court rejects “the argument that political speech of corporations or other associations should be treated differently under the First Amendment simply because such associations are not “natural persons.”<sup>105</sup> He also stated that, “corporations and other associations, like individuals, contribute to the ‘discussion, debate, and the dissemination of information and ideas.”<sup>106</sup> This leads him to his final deafening conclusion that any regulation or “prohibition on corporate independent expenditures is thus a ban on speech.”<sup>107</sup> This decision entirely

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<sup>104</sup> Citizens United v. Federal Elections Commission, No. 08-205 (Supreme Court of the United States January 21, 2010). Pg. 354

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., Pg. 343

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., Pg. 343

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., Pg. 339

reframes the idea of personhood and of speech, and therefore of political participation. The political actor is now a corporation, the political action is corporate expenditure. Long-standing regulations on which and how much corporate funds can and cannot be spent on politics were dissolved. *Citizens United* is a clear example of how neoliberal rationality not only affects individuals but also entire institutions. Rather than remaining stagnant within individual minds, neoliberalism spreads like a virus into systems and agencies and policies by the individuals who carry that rationality forward, as it is citizens who make policy decisions, write legislations, and adjudicate on issues. This decision is cited by many as the decision that opened the floodgates to private interests having a disproportionate influence on elections, but must also be pointed to as a moment in which neoliberalism warped what democracy is perceived to be, and what it looks like in the United States.

Turning now to concrete examples of how *Citizens United* altered voting in the United States. The most obvious and immediate result is the increase of corporate money in elections, and “much of this spending, known as “dark money,” never has to be publicly disclosed.”<sup>108</sup> For instance

A recent analysis of the 2014 Senate races by the Brennan Center for Justice found outside spending more than doubled since 2010, to \$486 million. Outside groups provided 47 percent of total spending – more than the candidates’ 41 percent – in 10 competitive races in last year’s midterms.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> “How *Citizens United* Has Changed Politics in 5 Years,” US News & World Report, accessed February 11, 2018, <https://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2015/01/21/5-years-later-citizens-united-has-remade-us-politics>.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

This influx of special interest money has been pointed to as a cause of polarization in politics. However, *Citizens United's* possibly more enduring effects is the reframing of corporations as people and therefore the reframing of corporate interests and actions as reasonable democratic political interest and actions. Specifically, "its definition of corporations as people protected by the First Amendment created a loophole that campaigns and PACs are all too happy to use to their advantage."<sup>110</sup> This influence is particularly worrying combined with the aforementioned rise in voter suppression laws across the United States, as voter suppression laws give a state the ability to "alter the electorate and shift outcomes toward those on the right. Where these laws are enacted, the influence of Democrats and liberals wanes and the power of Republicans grows."<sup>111</sup> This, combined with a deluge of private funds into elections, concentrates power over elections in the hands of corporations and those already in public office.

Those corporations and governmental officials have an incentive to maintain the status quo, as it ensures that they will remain in power. Expanding Justice Kennedy's metaphor of the political world as a marketplace, in Lockean liberalism the political realm is supposed to be controlled by citizens, as citizens are supposed to elect officials and hold them accountable for creating good legislation. Therefore, within this metaphor, in Lockean liberalism citizens are the producers. If citizens are producers then their political actions are the actions of production. Again, this would be voting for or against political candidates as well as voting directly for policy in certain cases. Citizens are equally consumers within this political marketplace, as they are receiving all the

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

consequences of the policies they help in crafting. With this in mind a Marxian analysis is useful. In neoliberalism citizens are still the consumers of the political marketplace as citizens are still the ones most directly affected by the policy and legislation established. The shift neoliberalism causes is that of changing who is in charge of production. Citizens are still voting, and protesting which will be discussed subsequently, but it is corporations that are influencing citizens pertaining to who they should elect or what they should support. The control corporations have over the general public post *Citizens United*, particularly combined with the increase in restrictive voting policies, is extreme. As previously stated, corporations have incentive to keep the status quo and therefore they have incentive to goad citizens into voting for officials who promise to maintain the status quo. Therefore, the political actions citizens are performing, particularly voting, are no longer benefiting them. To quote Marx, “the object which labor produces, its product, stands opposed to it as an alien thing, as a power independent of the producer.”<sup>112</sup> This is the case in neoliberal products. Corporations are controlling the greater political system and benefiting from the participation of others. Marx says of alienation that “the more the worker exerts himself, the more powerful becomes the alien objective world which he fashions against himself, the poorer he and his inner world become, the less there is that belongs to him.”<sup>113</sup> In the present state of American politics, merely participating politically by voting does not guarantee any actual change power in the system of government, as the systems answer to corporations more than actual citizens.

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<sup>111</sup> Hajnal, Lajevardi, and Nielson, “Analysis | Do Voter Identification Laws Suppress Minority Voting?”

<sup>112</sup> Wootton, *Modern Political Thought*. Pg. 767

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., Pg. 767

As stated previously, voting and protest are two of the most visible ways a citizen participates in politics. Turning now to the systems and institutions of political protest, specifically the previous example of bathroom bills in states such as North Carolina and Texas. The reasoning behind either valuing or devaluing a piece of legislation is clearly economic in those cases, but this reasoning, as well as the widely held conception of people as human capital, leads to a shift in which protests are successful and who the actors engaging in protest are. This is a protest not by the people, but by corporate leaders. When corporations entered the public debate surrounding bathroom bills they did so by threatening to pull their business out of states that instituted bathroom bills. In North Carolina, the bathroom bill repeal “came amid a looming threat that the N.C.A.A., which had already relocated a year’s worth of championship tournament games from the state, was planning to eliminate more, including future men’s Division I basketball tournaments.”<sup>114</sup>

This type of behavior, of attempting to force change by altering a party’s economic yield, is often referred to as hitting someone in their pocket book. Corporations did not fully enter the political realm, but instead used the power they had in the private sector to affect the government. This influence has been nicknamed “corporate activism” as well as “shareholder activism”. Activism in a general sense is defined by Merriam-Webster as “a doctrine or practice that emphasizes direct vigorous action especially in

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<sup>114</sup> Richard Fausset, “Bathroom Law Repeal Leaves Few Pleased in North Carolina,” *The New York Times*, March 30, 2017, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/30/us/north-carolina-senate-acts-to-repeal-restrictive-bathroom-law.html>.

support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue”<sup>115</sup> Compared to this, Investopedia defines a shareholder activist as “a person, who attempts to use his or her rights as a shareholder of a publicly-traded corporation to bring about change within or for the corporation.”<sup>116</sup> These definitions reveal the incongruity within the concept of a shareholder activist, as they are clearly considered to be someone who attempts to bring about change for the benefit of their corporation, whereas a political activist is using public action to promote their side of an issue to forward what they believe to be for the good of the entire public.

Defining corporate actions as “activism” represents a larger phenomenon, which is the reframing of elite corporate influence on politics as something democratic and beneficial to democracy. The use of the term activism immediately invokes vigorous public action by people fighting for justice, but in the corporate sense, ends up looking much more like deals behind doors. Locke likely could not have imagined the multi-billion-dollar corporations that exist today, and he certainly did not include any clauses about how businesses fit into his liberal utopia. It is not hard to imagine that Locke would not view current U.S. democracy as true liberal democracy. Lockean liberalism conjures images of a townhall, fierce public debate, and transparent and neutral arbitration. Under neoliberal rationality political participation and political protest are done by business for businesses and through transactions of money rather than through public debate and protest.

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<sup>115</sup> “Definition of ACTIVIST,” Merriam-Webster, accessed February 10, 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/activist>.



Business leaders are not expected to be apolitical, and it is not usual that a business leader would take a public stance on a piece of legislation. It is, however, relatively novel to see the business world and the government so intertwined in dealing with issues that do not directly pertain to the economy. Specifically, there is an increase of this “corporate activism” in relation to values-based legislation. This has been playing out across the United States. “This was a pattern that played out repeatedly throughout 2016: 1) State introduces anti-LGBT legislation, 2) business leaders vow to oppose discrimination, and 3) the law is either vetoed outright or passes at a steep cost.”<sup>117</sup> Journalist Rick Paulas noted that “businesses taking stands on social issues isn't anything new, but it seems to have become normalized, particularly during the presidency of Donald Trump.”<sup>118</sup> He continues, questioning the legitimacy of this progressive fervor and the precarious nature of relying on corporations for social change. He states,

but should corporations really adopt the role of society's moral police? On the one hand, the influence of corporations—that is to say, the sway of their money—is a more significant driver of policy than, say, a bunch of volunteers working for an advocacy non-profit. And if our elected officials are lagging behind, smart corporations can actually get ahead of a slow legislative process... yet it's difficult to ignore the problems with trusting corporations to lead social change.<sup>119</sup>

That is to say, corporations clearly have power, and this can seem beneficial when the power is used towards something in agreement with the majority of Americans.

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<sup>116</sup> Investopedia Staff, “Shareholder Activist,” Investopedia, September 29, 2005, <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/shareholderactivist.asp>.

<sup>117</sup> Nico Lang, “The Limits of Corporate Activism: Why a Business Boycott Won’t Stop Trump from Repealing LGBT r...,” Salon, December 14, 2016, <https://www.salon.com/2016/12/14/the-limits-of-corporate-activism-why-a-business-boycott-wont-stop-trump-from-repealing-lgbt-rights/>.

<sup>118</sup> Paulas, “The Limits of Corporate Activism,” Pacific Standard, accessed January 2, 2018, <https://psmag.com/economics/the-limits-of-corporate-activism>.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

The progressiveness that corporations are displaying, or any ideological stance that corporations might display when advocating for a particular policy, is just circumstantial to the fact that corporations are always looking to profit maximize. Therefore, corporate support for social change cannot be guaranteed. Despite the rift that this bill caused between the business community and legislators, it does not represent a permanent fissure in that relationship. On the contrary, the responsiveness that legislators granted to business leaders who opposed a bill is representative of the continued close relationship between government and CEOs. The business leaders acknowledged that “this debate has put Republicans at odds with business like never before. But several business leaders who spoke to The News said they didn’t expect the rift to be long-lived.”<sup>120</sup> This displays that corporate activism is reliable for only one thing, pursuing corporate interests. These interests can be framed in various lights but they always hold profit maximization as the supreme interest.

This codified interest in profit with social concerns only acting instrumentally towards that goal shows that corporations ought not be relied upon for progressive political fervor as many may assume. Furthermore, even when corporations’ interests do fall in line with progressive interests, their power to create change is fixed in their power to move capital. Specifically, the power of corporations lies largely in their ability to move from one state to another, taking resources away from one state and placing them somewhere else. If a piece of legislation is national, that will take away a business’s ability to relocate. Journalist Nico Lang suggests this unlikely hypothetical to point out

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<sup>120</sup> Laura McGaughy, “Big Business Has (Almost) Killed the Texas ‘Bathroom Bill.’”.

the limits of corporate activism; “Imagine if the NBA moved all future All-Star Games to cities London, Paris, of Rome, and Apple announced that it would be moving business to China.”<sup>121</sup> This displays that there are limits on corporate political clout no matter the policy they are pushing.

*Neoliberal Policy and the Theoretical Feedback Loop:*

I have already explained how neoliberalism alters the theoretical underpinnings of political arguments, changes the role and relationship of the citizen to the government and vice versa, and changes the types of actions successful in garnering political change. I now seek to explain that the shifts I have described will continue to grow in influence because neoliberal institutions disseminate neoliberal rationality, reinforcing it and strengthening its hold on society. Noting the way that institutions influence the general public and critically examining how neoliberal rationality is normalized is a necessary step to stemming its influence as the dominant framework.

By way of summarizing, neoliberal rationality has entered the hearts and minds of citizens of all walks of life. It is the predominant rationality for all realms and sub realms of life. This has been done through the reconceptualization of individuals as human capital, allowing for neoliberalism to enter realms previously thought to be non-economic. Once neoliberal rationality takes hold as dominant, acting as hegemonic thought, it affects the decision-making pattern and actions of individuals. Through these actions, neoliberal rationality uses human action as a virus would a cell, using the actions

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<sup>121</sup> Lang, “The Limits of Corporate Activism.”

of one person to influence public institutions and government through voting, protesting, and legislation writing. This means that neoliberal rationality is the predominant rationality of how citizens affect their government, and also the predominant rationality of the government itself.

As previously illustrated, neoliberal rationality has entered the realm of election law through those Justices who used neoliberal rationality to analyze political participation. Locke conceived the field of law to be focused on justice. For Locke, justice pertained primarily to security of property, beginning first and foremost with oneself, as well as the promise that each person will be granted a neutral arbiter in cases of dispute. This is evident in this quote from Locke in which he states that government is the solution for the evils that “necessarily follow from men’s being judges in their own cases, and the state of nature is therefore not to be endured.”<sup>122</sup> Therefore, the benefit that government gives is an ability for neutral parties to judge cases rather than special interest parties. Justice, then, is meant to secure the natural rights of individuals even while they are in a society. Contrary to this formulation, Justice Kennedy employed an economic mindset continually in adjudicating on *Citizens United* which pertained to election law. This decision has influenced every court of law, as the Supreme Court is the most powerful court in the United States and sets the tone and standards for all other areas of law and legal practice. Through the decision on *Citizens United* neoliberal rationality has also entered the system of voting. Justice Kennedy’s reformulation of spending money as political speech means that corporations and other entities that have

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<sup>122</sup> Wootton, *Modern Political Thought*. Pg. 289

more liquid access to money also have more power in elections than those citizens who do not have control over mass amounts of capital. It has allowed corporations to have unequal influence on elections and voting, all under the auspice of equality, as Justice Kennedy explicitly states that “corporations or other associations should be treated differently under the First Amendment simply because such associations are not “natural persons.”<sup>123</sup> Yet, the amount of money and interest that corporations have can be attractive to political candidates because of the advertising it allows them to produce – something that individuals cannot necessarily do. Neoliberalism has also reformulated the system of activism. Political participation and political protest in general have become a corporate game because government representatives are more responsive to neoliberal reason than any other form of reason. Corporations can wield heavy influence on the government, and on citizens, based on their ability to control capital and therefore affect economic growth or decline. Citizens are becoming reliant upon this corporate activism in order to make change in their government, willingly giving up their power in a democracy to corporations.

These changes in systems and institutions are not where neoliberalism ends however. Once infected, institutions continue to disseminate neoliberal rationality into more and more realms of life. This is because institutions are able to set norms through promoting certain conduct and devaluing others. Foucault describes this phenomenon, of policy and institutions having a productive affect upon public opinion, through his discussion of what I have chosen to call soft power, describing power that is not explicit

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<sup>123</sup> *Citizens United*. Pg. 343

force. Foucault, in fact, says that power over others is most often seen through soft power, rather than overt duress. It can be seen through creating systems of conduct that people accept as normal, ultimately eliminating other possible conduct. He says, “the exercise of power consists in guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome.”<sup>124</sup> Institutions are able to do this, to act upon citizens, by setting the parameters of their possible actions. This is because institutions have public qualities allowing them to assert certain narratives. Institutions also have a network of staff, often bureaucrats, that can disseminate a particular message. Overall, people who currently control institutions and systems of power are able to construct a world that, once it exists, it is difficult to deviate from. Foucault describes this saying, “to govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action of others.”<sup>125</sup> This structuring of action should not be understood *only* as a structuring of action however. It must also be understood as a dissemination of a particular rationality. In this case it is neoliberal rationality. This is a feedback loop where citizens who create public structures, institutions, and engage in political practices like voting do so using neoliberal rationality, and these institutions then reinforce this rationality by implementing the results for years following.

This feedback loop of ideology informing political structures which then spread particular ideology is not only recognized in the theoretical work of scholars like Foucault; political scientists who employ empirical methods have also recorded the influence of institutions on public opinion. The political process is not linear, meaning it

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<sup>124</sup> Hubert L. Dreyfus, Paul Rabinow, and Michel Foucault, *Michel Foucault, beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 2nd ed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983). Pg. 221

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., Pg. 221

does not unfold in a straight line. In a review of relevant literature on policy feedback Dr. Andrea Louise Campbell, a leading scholar on the subject, states that “policies themselves can be causal, shaping the political landscape and influencing the capacities, interests, and preferences of political actors and of the state itself.”<sup>126</sup> She describes how policy feedback has implications for democratic governance saying that democracies necessitate that the government be responsive to its citizens’ preferences, calling this the citizen-input model. But she also argues that “the feedback concept threatens this citizen-input model by showing that the very citizen preferences to which policy makers are supposed to respond may arise from previous policies themselves.”<sup>127</sup> She further elaborates on the implications of policy feedback for democracy by describing inequality of access and influence in government. She says, “democracy is predicated on the equal distance of citizens from government, and yet some citizens’ preferences are much more likely to be expressed in policy than others.”<sup>128</sup> This observation echoes the issues that neoliberalism produces in that neoliberalism gives corporations greater access to the government than citizens have. Campbell continues saying that public programs and institutions “shape the ability, interest, and opportunities of citizens to participate politically. The structure of policies can undermine or build up recipients’ participation, disadvantaging or advantaging groups beyond their personal characteristics. Government itself shapes patterns of political inequality through the designs of public policies.”<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Andrea Louise Campbell, “Policy Makes Mass Politics,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 15, no. 1 (2012): 333–51, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-012610-135202>. Pg. 334

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., Pg. 342

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., Pg. 342

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., Pg. 342

Foucault lays out an analysis for how this type of power develops and affects individual citizens. He calls this the process of subjectification. Subjectification is the ways in which citizens themselves allow power structures to control them. Soft power, particularly the power of institutions which promote a particular neoliberal rationality, a particular conception of the self and code of action, is a form of power that “applies itself to immediate everyday life.”<sup>130</sup> Individuals, by accepting neoliberal logic into their life, perpetuate their own systems of subjugation, and thus Foucault is intently focused on the relationship of power to the subject, saying his primary goal

has not been to analyze the phenomena of power, nor to elaborate the foundations of such an analysis. My objective, instead, has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects.<sup>131</sup>

In order to limit this subjectification Foucault suggests that individuals must be critical of the way the government and institutions of power define them. He says that “maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are.”<sup>132</sup> This means that citizens ought not take on the self-conception of human capital that neoliberal rationality prioritizes.

One other method of limiting this subjectification is by consciously analyzing the justifications for the modes of soft power that affect the citizenry. Doing so first enables citizens to pinpoint more clearly who benefits from neoliberalism, and also demystifies and demythologizes neoliberalism as a hegemonic form of reason. That is to say, pointing

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<sup>130</sup> Michel Foucault, James D. Faubion, and Michel Foucault, *Power*, Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, Michel Foucault ; Vol. 3 (New York: New Press, 2000). Pg. 331

<sup>131</sup> Michel Foucault and Paul Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader*, 1st ed (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984). Pg. 7

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., Pg. 22



out neoliberalism's justifications questions why it is hegemonic thought and what is being done to keep it in that position. In terms of neoliberal rationality, one of the major ways it is justified is through equating neoliberalism with the classical liberalism that the United States was founded on. Foucault says that "power relations have been progressively governmentalized, that is to say, elaborated, rationalized, and centralized in the form of, or under the auspices of, state institutions."<sup>133</sup> Furthermore, a critical dissection of the way these state institutions' actions and messages are "rationalized—organized, in any case—in terms of new ends"<sup>134</sup> is necessary to uncover how citizens are becoming subordinated to those who benefit from the rationalization. In the case of neoliberalism, corporations benefit from having their own position in society reformulated and described using classically liberal terminology; using terms such as "corporate activism" and "marketplace of ideas."

This paper has scrutinized in detail the differences between Lockean liberal ideology, the ideology the United States was founded on, and neoliberal rationality, which dominates the current state of political affairs. Neoliberalism may be disguised as liberalism but as detailed in this Independent Study, political participation in liberalism is much different than political participation today. Neoliberalism rides atop liberalism, infiltrating the hearts and minds of citizens, altering political institutions and systems, while also feeding back into the consciousness of the polity through those institutions. A Foucauldian defense against this mode of reproduction is a critical analysis of this process with special attention paid to pointing it out as it happens. Following this naming

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<sup>133</sup> Dreyfus, Rabinow, and Foucault, *Michel Foucault, beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Pg. 224

and shaming process, individuals must take up the task of spurning neoliberal rationality as it affects them by actively rejecting the self-conception of human capital and promoting other forms of rationality such as judicial, moral, environmental, and egalitarian.

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<sup>134</sup> Foucault, Faubion, and Foucault, *Power*. Pg. 386

## **Chapter Four: Conclusion**

Through a theoretical analysis of both liberalism as advanced by John Locke and neoliberal rationality as reconstructed by Wendy Brown, I have demonstrated a specific evolution of political thought in the United States. This project illustrates how neoliberalism incorporates much of liberal thought but prioritizes different values – specifically, political values are reformulated as economic values. The actor in a democracy, the citizen, internalizes neoliberalism and develops a conception of self as human capital rather than as a laborer or as a juridical subject. This is important because neoliberalism is often justified by describing it in idealized liberal terms, thus making it more intelligible and more palatable to the public, such as describing money as speech and corporate influence as activism. This is possible because the United States was founded on liberal principles and therefore tying a political thought or action to liberalism immediately frames it as acceptable in the United States. Liberalism itself is not free of flaws – Marx points this out clearly – however the language and the myth of liberalism remains the foundation of American thought. The change that neoliberalism causes in goals produces a change in the types of action are employed in order to effectively achieve political changes. Political participation is increasingly guided by corporations that control a majority of capital in society. Citizens must go through corporations in order to make political changes, alienating themselves from their own role as primary actors in the political process.

The implications of this change are that it alters the avenues for citizens to affect change in their government while simultaneously severely limiting the political power

citizens have over their government. Democracy's promise is that citizens will hold the ultimate power in government, yet democracy seen through the lens of neoliberalism is a form of government almost entirely focused on economic growth with political activity being secondary or instrumental to economic activity. The current study of political participation can be expanded and applied to democracy in general because political participation goes to the core of democracy, that being citizens holding the power in their government. When these tenets are no longer being fulfilled democracy becomes an empty promise. The damage that neoliberalism has caused will continue to affect the United States political system for years to come, as neoliberalism has entered political institutions and therefore is being disseminated into the minds of citizens continually, reinforcing its dominance. This process cannot be undone easily, and neoliberalism, now that it exists so prominently, will likely never be completely eliminated from the political sphere, however there are ways to critique neoliberalism so that it loses some of its hegemony over political thought. The first way to mitigate neoliberalism's effects is by actively rebuking the rationality of neoliberalism publicly so as to heighten the profile of neoliberalism as an issue and cause more discussion within the public forum about why particular political decisions are made. The second is by advocating for a pluralism of modes of reason so that neoliberalism is no longer the sole ascendant rationality but rather a competitor in field of rationalities, some of which critique neoliberalism directly, and each of which can be considered reasonable fulfillments of the Constitution.

First, I join Michel Foucault in arguing that there are individual changes that can, perhaps not stop neoliberalism, but in some way, limit its effects. The first of these is a

form of naming and shaming, a common practice in international political science that consists of calling out impropriety, in this case the use of neoliberal rationality and the glossing over of its pernicious effects, and publicly shaming those actors who are responsible in order to make an example of them. Since neoliberalism justifies itself by appearing as liberalism, an acknowledgment of the differences between liberalism and neoliberalism is necessary, particularly when neoliberalism is employed by public figures or journalists. This, in many ways, demythologizes both neoliberalism and liberalism. Currently Lockean liberalism is viewed as the ideal form of government; however, liberalism as Locke formulated it never truly existed. Liberalism in practice manifests different than Locke theorized, with Marx offering the most obvious critique. Neoliberalism is theoretically different from liberalism yet still presents as liberalism in order to validate itself. Highlighting how neoliberalism is a separate theoretical entity that is not the theoretical underpinning of The Declaration of Independence will create fertile ground to be critical against neoliberalism in the future. One of the best ways to defend against a form of soft power is by making it visible and poking holes in the assertion that some form of conduct is the only acceptable form of conduct. Therefore, pointing out that neoliberalism is different than liberalism illustrates that neoliberalism has alternatives.

Second, asserting that neoliberalism has alternatives can also be done through actively employing other modes of reason concerning public issues. A pluralism of modes of reason is one way to defend against neoliberalism's hegemony of thought in the United States. Various paradigms of reason that are not based in an economic calculus will prioritize different values and suggest different forms of conduct. Some forms of

reason, such as Marxism, offer a direct critique of neoliberalism. In this project, I have not forwarded a particular form of reason that ought to be predominant, as the predominance of neoliberalism and its inability to share space with other forms of reason is one of its primary issues. Rather, I have advocated for individuals to employ various forms of reason that make sense to them given their contexts, rather than acquiescing to neoliberal rationality. I will illustrate briefly some examples of how public issues can be conceived of differently depending on the form of reason employed.

First, moral or religious reasoning are useful because religion is informed by conceptions of the divine and specific positions on what is considered “good”. My argument is not for religious reasoning to be applied to all public questions, or to dominate the decision-making on public questions, but rather my argument is for each person to use their own ideas of morality as a lens through which they can adjudicate on public issues, as I believe it is common for individuals to allow their own religious beliefs to influence their decisions already. Moral reasoning is simply another form of reasoning that has a value system and a particular form of conduct it recommends, and this form of reasoning can be a useful critique for neoliberalism. For instance, someone using a particular moral reasoning may value charity above all other things, and so their conception of taking in refugees may be that of a charitable policy that is necessary in order to help the less fortunate among us. A neoliberal would first assess how much human capital a potential refugee would be bringing to the United States, and then how this human capital could be utilized through employment to increase corporate revenue

and therefore GDP. These two processes display how different conclusions of what is the “right” thing to do could be reached, depending on the starting framework.

A second example is judicial reasoning which has been historically employed in the field of law, and also offers a critique of neoliberalism. Judicial reasoning prioritizes justice, which in and of itself has a pluralism of definitions. Justice Kennedy deviated from judicial reasoning proper in making his decision on *Citizens United*. A more justice oriented reading of that case would have acknowledged that corporations have inherently more resources than citizens, as well as more explicit interests, and therefore a policy which intends to equalize corporation’s power compared to citizen’s power is acting to establish justice in elections. However, Justice Kennedy chose to treat elections as a laissez-faire market that ought to be left to its own devices. The Stanford Dictionary of Philosophy states that justice “at the level of public policy, reasons of justice are distinct from, and often compete with, reasons of other kinds, for example economic efficiency or environmental value.”<sup>135</sup>

A third mode of reason that can be a critique of neoliberalism is feminist reasoning. Feminism as a term contains a pluralism of definitions, and feminist reasoning can bring an individual to various conclusions. Some of feminist theory is compatible with classic liberalism because of its focus on individual rights. More radical feminist theory contains aspects of Marxism and queer theory. What all forms of feminism share is a recognition that female and non-binary individuals are subject to power more so and

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<sup>135</sup> David Miller, “Justice,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2017 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2017), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/justice/>.

in different ways than male presenting individuals. An example of feminist reasoning acting as a critique of neoliberalism is that feminism would support longer maternity leave as well as mandatory paternity leave because it is a more humane practice of allowing a new mother to recuperate and also evens the playing field between men and women in the office. This is because “giving leave to everyone lessens the stigma and the penalties women face at work when they become moms and begin the endless work/family juggle.”<sup>136</sup> Neoliberal reasoning would approach the issue of parental leave by analyzing how much money would be possibly lost by allowing longer maternity leave and mandatory paternity leave but also how attractive does the company come to would be workers if they offer an attractive paternal leave policy. Depending upon the conclusion a neoliberal comes to feminist reasoning could either be at odds with it or be congruent with it. If the decisions are congruent the process of getting there are very different between the two modes of reason however.

A final mode of reason that I believe the United States ought to incorporate more into public discussions is Marxist reasoning. Due to the Cold War and McCarthyism, the U.S. does not have a history of Marxist thought in public office, and I believe that is one of the reasons neoliberalism has been able to rise to dominance with relatively little resistance. Marxism values distributive equality and abhors elite and corporate power, and therefore offers a crucial critique of both liberalism and neoliberalism. Many individuals are slow to bring Marx up because of a connotation of un-Americanism, but I am not asserting that the United States ought to become a communist country, I am

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<sup>136</sup> Emily Peck, “The Feminist Case For Paternity Leave,” *Huffington Post*, July 9, 2015, sec. Business,



asserting that Marxist reasoning as a supplement to all other forms of reasoning is viable option if a pluralism of reasons is to be instituted.

Theories are the backbone of society because theories situate individuals in a particular worldview, from which they base their values, their desired outcomes, and their code of conduct. Neoliberal rationality is just a set of thoughts, just a notion or view towards the world, yet it has profound and concrete effects on society. Applying different theories to the world allows for new truths to come to light. That is why theory in general is a necessary component of political inquiry. Allowing for multiple truths to exist at once means that no *one* particular truth can have dominance over all the others. Currently neoliberalism is the principle form of thought in the Western world but it does not have to be this way. Using theory to counter neoliberal rationality, though not a panacea, has the potential to have concrete implications for society by possibly causing a reversal in court cases, a new attitude towards representation, or revitalized public discourse. Rationalities and ideologies have power because they build institutions, which in turn perpetuates ideology. A critique of neoliberal theory allows for a reformulation of American ideals and a re-imagination of the very institutions and systems of the United States political system. It also reinvigorates democracy by forcing citizens to actively consider what democracy ought to mean, how it should be instituted, and what a citizen must do to preserve it.

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